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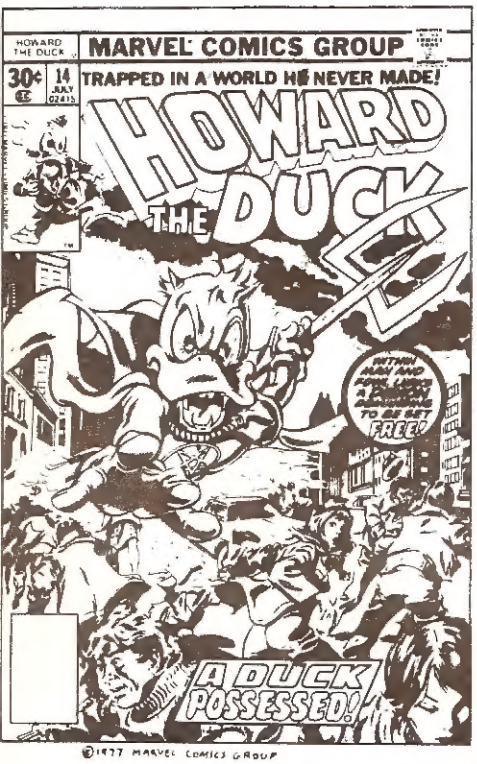
COMICS NEWS BEMUSING MAGAZINE



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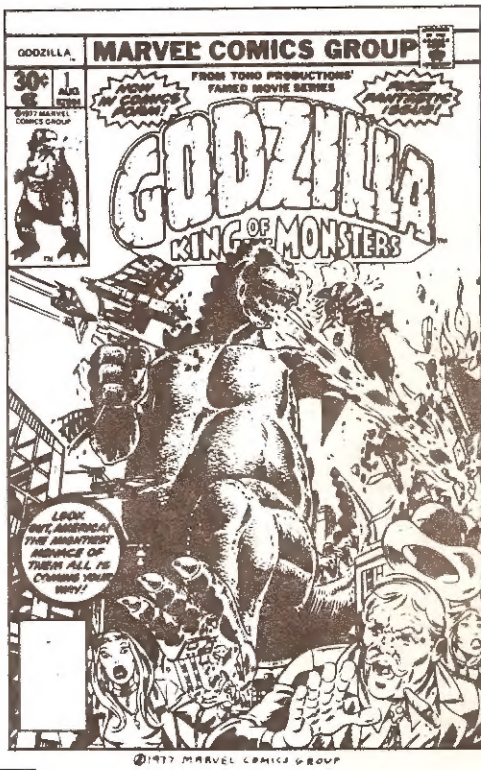
THE COMIC REVIEW



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60¢
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--AND NOW--THE PIT OF HELL GAPES FOR YOU!

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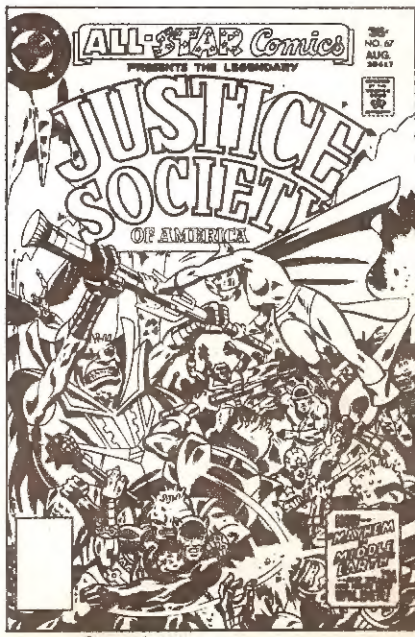

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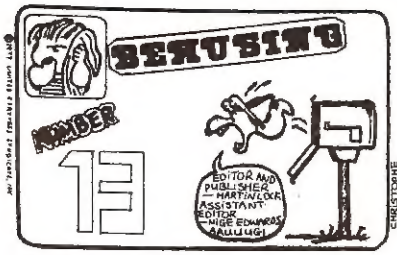

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Martin Noone: 8
Trevor Phoenix: 7 (pencils)
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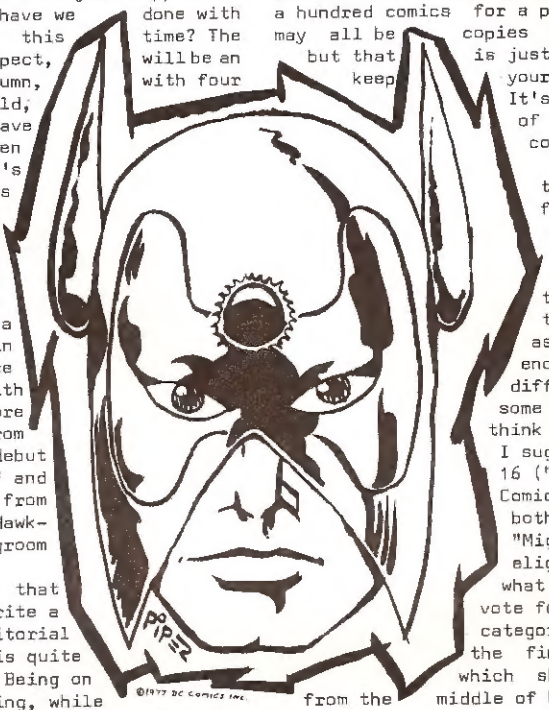
BEMUSINGS

Just to keep you on your toes, Bem grows into a bigger, I hope more attractive zine, at no extra cost. This larger page size has meant that we can fit 80% more text onto a single page than in the past, so, especially with the number of ads severely cut back, you've got more reading here than in Bem-12, and better value than ever. No applause--just send subscriptions, and tell your friends, okay? To keep up this sort of performance on a regular schedule, we need your support.

And what, you ask, have we done with the extra elbow-room, this time? The main attraction, I expect, will be an extra-long letter column, with four full pages -- that would, in the smaller Bem, have taken up a full seven pages! Ruan Lanihorne's "Deathlok" article has fitted neatly onto a single page, instead of two, while "Reg Uspatoff" and Ruan's "Made In Britain" are both able to go into a lot more detail than in the past. Oh, the space certainly filled up with astonishing speed--more strips, including from Chris Ash the dynamic debut of both "Captain Frog" and (by public demand, from "Second Chance For a Hawkman" in Bem-12) "Stangroom the Woodpecker".



Of all the columns that I write, and I do write a number, this, an editorial for my own fanzine, is quite the most difficult. Being on page two is restricting, while I find that, since I tend to leave this page and the front cover until last, I'm also just about "talked out". If I get a letter tomorrow from Alan Austin asking for "Worlds of Emlock" by return, or Marc Baines rings to ask for a short comic strip, I'd have no such problems, though. Maybe I should get Ed Sallis to write the editorial next time, I've never known HIM to be short of a word or two!

Talking of Ed reminds me of COMICON 77, which he mentions on page 14. I must say I'm looking forward to it, and have booked myself a room at the hotel--trying to sleep on the floor while the films were going on was one aspect of the weekend last year I'd rather not relive! Since there are a whole two days, there's time not just to rush in, empty your wallet, and dash out again behind a pile of comics--there's plenty of time to sit out in the foyer, chatting to people who share your interests, and comparing purchases and wants. Why, if you attend the auctions, you can easily snap up a real bargain, like a hundred comics for a pound or two! They may all be copies of the same comic, but that is just a good reason to keep your wits about you! It's the best week-end of the year, anyway--come along!

You may have seen the nomination form for what have been named "The Eagle Awards"--in fact, subscribers ought to get copies with this Bem, since I've asked for them often enough. There are 19 different categories, some a bit difficult to think of anything in; may I suggest, for category 16 ("Favourite British Comics Character"), that both "Captain Nuts" and "Mighty Man" would be eligible? I can't think what else there is to vote for in 1976 in that category, though no doubt the final voting ballot, which should be available from the middle of May on, will be full of other possibilities. It will be available from Mike Conroy, 52 Roydene Rd, Plumstead, London SE18 1QA, and lots of other places.

Oh well, my thanks go to all this issue's contributors, plus for much of the news Colin Campbell--and, of course, you. -Martin Lock

BEM BACK ISSUE DEPARTMENT!

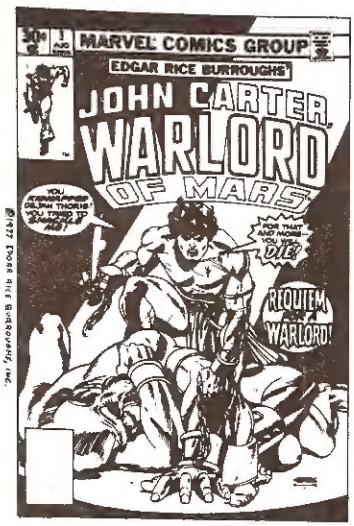
Someone, somewhere hasn't bought his Bem back issues yet--remember, postal rates are to rise soon, so this is probably your last chance to get 'em at these prices:

Bem-1 -12 pages for 8p, with E-Man #1 reviewed, pricing, and Tale-Enders.
Summer Comics Special - 4pp for 8p, art by Superswipe & Chown, news 'n' reviews.
Bem-3 -12 pp for 10p. "Bullpun Bulletins", a Manhunter article, and Paul Rose art.
N-Zine #1 - 16 pp for 11p. Edwoods, a comics strip by Ken Cropper, reviews, etc.
Bem-5 -16 pp for 14p. "Fatlas Comics" by April, Straw, & Superswipe, and more...
Bem-6 - 20 pp for 14p. The coming to Bem of Capt Nuts!
Bem-7 -16 + 8 pp for 14p. Be warned, this issue includes the WEIRD TRASH Bem spoof!
Bem-8 -20 pp for 14p. Conan appraised by Hunter Tremayne --and all the regular gang.
Bem-9 -40 pp for 28p. With THE UK HEROINE ADDICT #1 by top USA and UK fans.
Bem-10 -20 pp for 14p. "The Bem Story -- So Far" by Jim Korock, and lots more stuff.
Bem-11 -20pp for 14p. Red Sonja by Hunter Tremayne, plus Chris Ash, etc.
Bem-12 -28pp for 20p. It's our special Howard the Duck issue, with HTD interviewed by Nige Edwards, plus Kath Glancy, Rich Morrissey, etc

SPECIAL OFFER! All twelve fanzines, 232 pages, for £1 --or any seven for 80p...

NEWS

IRON FIST #15 is the final issue. Chris Claremont is taking over POWER MAN, joined from #48 by John Byrne -- Iron Fist and his friends become regulars in the book from then on. LOGAN'S RUN #7 is the final issue. THE INHUMANS ends with #12, while the story-line is continued in CAPTAIN MARVEL. MARVEL PRESENTS #12 is the final issue -- watch THOR ANNUAL and AVENGERS for the continuing exploits of the Guardians of the Galaxy. SUPER-VILLAIN TEAM-UP #14 is the last issue; the plot-threads are to be resolved in CHAMPIONS. And OMEGA #10 is the ultimate issue --but DR STRANGE is reprieved.

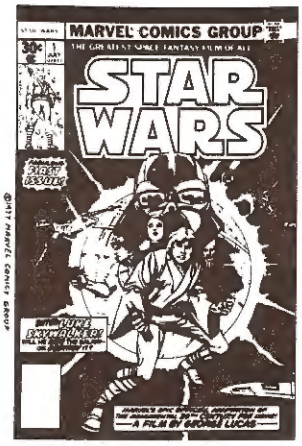


POWER MAN and DAREDEVIL are reduced to bimonthly status-- they'll continue to be imported in alternate months, with the gap replaced by STAR WARS (from #2, August); LOGAN'S RUN will be replaced by HUMAN FLY.

The 1977 DEFENDERS and MASTER OF KUNG FU annuals are replaced by annuals for TARZAN and JOHN CARTER. SPIDER-MAN ANNUAL #11 is drawn by Don Perlin.

Joining the SPIDER-MAN daily newspaper strip are CONAN and HOWARD THE DUCK strips--as Gene Colan is to draw the HTD strip, he may not be able to continue on a monthly TOMB OF DRACULA. As Marv Wolfman has said he'll leave the book if the art team changes, Marvel may prefer to make TOMB OF DRACULA bimonthly.

Carmine Infantino is working for Marvel; after two issues of DAREDEVIL and one of NOVA, his first regular book will be the new SPIDERWOMAN title, which follows out of a MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE continued story.

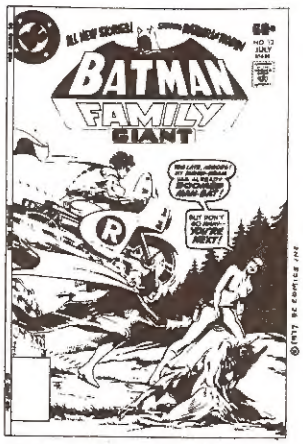


MARVEL PREMIERE #38 & 39 star the Liberty Legion; #40 starts a 4-part adaptation of Robert E. Howard's novel "Almuric" by Roy Thomas & Tim Conrad.

MARVEL TEAM-UP forthcoming guest-stars include Iron Fist, followed by either Nighthawk, Black Panther, Nick Fury, or Man-Thing, and then Cap Britain. MARVEL PREVIEW #11 (Claremont, Byrne & Austin) is the Starlord issue. RAMPAGING HULK #4 is by Jim Starlin & Alex Nino; after this Hulk & Sub-Mariner battle for two issues. WHAT IF #4 is supposed to be either the "Conan in 1977" issue (What If #3's letters page says), "Invaders battling after World War II" (What If #3's story's last page says), or the "Captain America & Bucky" story--you work it out!

The next MARVEL TREASURY is a Conan issue, with "Song of Red Sonja" (Conan #24), "Night of the Dark Gods" (Savage Tales 4), and "Black Colossus" (Savage Sword #2).

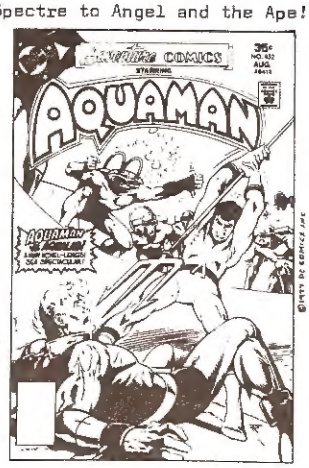
A 48-page, 50c one-shot of "The Island of Dr Moreau", by Doug Moench & Larry Hama, will be out late in June. From STAR WARS #2, Steve Leialoha's Howie Chaykin's regular inker. Gil Kane's drawing a GHOST RIDER fill-in; GR fights Dr Druid in #26. MS MARVEL #6 is drawn by Keith Pollard; Sal Buscema takes over from #7. And Luke Cage gets a new costume in POWER MAN 50.



DC are ending DC SPECIAL with #29 (the origin of the Justice Society); it was to have then continued with annual editions of many DC titles, but instead these will be numbered as true annuals. Except for two Dollar Comics (SUPERMAN ANNUAL #9 out in June, and FIVE STAR SUPER-HERO SPECTACULAR #1 in August) they're all 60c issues. July brings SGT ROCK ANNUAL #1, and UNEXPECTED ANNUAL #1; August, besides Five-Star, SECRET SOCIETY OF SUPER-VILLAINS ANNUAL #1; September GHOSTS ANNUAL #1; November BRAVE & BOLD ANNUAL #1; December has FLASH ANNUAL #2; February WONDER WOMAN ANNUAL #1; March AQUAMAN ANNUAL #1; and May GREEN LANTERN ANNUAL #1. In conjunction with these, the DC SUPER-STARS 60-center has been demoted to quarterly, and will appear in months in which no annual is scheduled, from #18, on sale in October, on.

GREEN LANTERN goes monthly as of #97--to allow time for this, Julie Schwartz hands over TEEN TITANS to Jack C. Harris, who quickly drops YOUNG LOVE; #126 is the final issue.

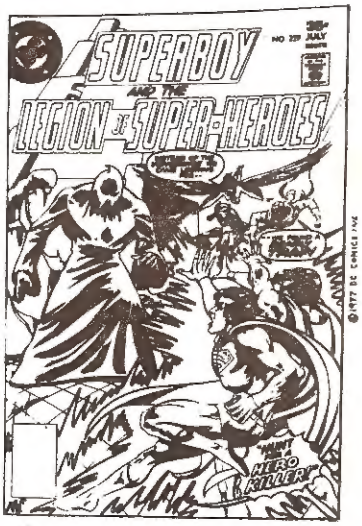
BATMAN #300 and SHOWCASE #100 are special 60c issues; Steve Englehart will script a story featuring every character who ever graduated from a Showcase try-out for the latter issue, from Flash to Enemy Ace to the Spectre to Angel and the Ape!



Ross Andru rejoins DC after completing his current Marvel work; he will be under exclusive contract, and be a full editor, as indeed now are Paul Levitz, Denny O'Neil, Jack C. Harris, & E. Nelson Bridwell. Also on exclusive contracts are David (Aquaman, Star Hunters, & Grave Digger) Michelinie, Don (Teen Titans, Batgirl & Robin) Heck, Bob (All Star & Secret Society) Layton, and Philip (Action, etc) Blaisdell--also known as Tex.

CHALLENGERS OF THE UNKNOWN will guest-star, over the next few issues, Rip Hunter, Phantom Stranger, Deadman, and Swamp Thing, whose story is now to be retold in THE ORIGINAL SWAMP THING SAGA, a 60c title.

DC SUPER-STARS #17, which was to be the "Secret Society of Super-Villains" story now to go in their annual, will instead be a secret origins issue, with GREEN ARROW, a member of the LSH, and a completely new hero.



UNKNOWN SOLDIER, WEIRD WAR, and JONAH HEX are now monthly. The new war title MEN OF WAR has as lead feature "Code Name: Gravedigger", a black commando created and scripted by David Michelinie; issues 1-3 have as back-up Enemy Ace.

Before #100, SHOWCASE is to feature DOOM PATROL (Negative Woman, Celsius, & Tempest, plus Robotman, by Paul Kupperberg, Ed Davis & Joe Rubinstein) in issues 94 to 96, followed by POWER GIRL from the JSA by Paul Levitz and Joe Staton.

SUPER-TEAM FAMILY #12 stars Green Lantern & Hawkman, while #13 has Aquaman & the Atom, and #14 fits in the Secret Society of Super-Villains, Cap Comet, and Wonder Woman, followed by Flash and the new New Gods.

Gerry Conway returns to script METAL MEN with #54. Wrightson has done two covers for HOUSE OF MYSTERY and one for HOUSE OF SECRETS; Richard Morrissey has scripted a tale for HoM.

Chris Ash PRESENTS... CAPTAIN FROG!

BUT SINCE EVERY HERO'S STORY MUST START SOMEWHERE (HUH? WHERE'D THE SPLASH PANEL GO?) OURS OPENS IN THE REMOTE FASTNESS OF LEFT BANK PARIS...

IN THE BACK ROOM OF A SLEAZY DELICATESSEN AN EXPERIMENT OF GREAT MOMENT IS TAKING PLACE...

RENÉ, I AM ABOUT TO 'AVE A FORMIDABLE GASTRIC BREAKTHROUGH!

I SOUGHT YOU WERE LOOKING OFF-COLAIR PROFES...

IDIOT!

I MEAN ZE NEW STRAIN OF GARLIC IS ALMOST FINI!

AH OUI! 'OW ZEY WILL HONAIR US... IN SEINE UNIVERSITY!

FABRIQUÉ EN ANGLETERRE

I 'AVE ONLY TO MIX ZESE TWO FINAL CHEMICALS AND...

P'AN!

* PARDON MY FRENCH— CULTURE-SHOCKED CHRIS

AS THE SMOKE CLEARS...

I DON'T BELIEVE IT! LE GENERAL à BB!

HEAR US GALLIC ONE! YOU 'AVE BEEN CHOSEN TO BECOME A LIVING SYMBOL OF ALL ZAT IS MAGNIFIQUE IN ZE MOTHERLAND!

MAIS... MAIS, POURQUOI... MOI?

BECAUSE... I KNOW MY MAN...

AND 'E WEARS...

ZENDIQ!

ALTHOUGH THE BOTTLE OF MYSTICAL AFTERSHAVE HAS LEFT MUCH OF HIM SMELLING LIKE A DOWNTOWN PARIS BROTHEL, RENÉ RIDDLEAU NOW POSSESSES AN AWESOME WEAPON IN HIS HYPERBREATH, THE EQUIVALENT OF TEN INTENSIVE PRODUCTION GARLIC PLANTS AT MAXIMUM OUTPUT, WHICH CAN KILL A MAN AT 100 METRES! LIKE THE EYE-BEAMS OF THE VULGAR AMERICAN, CYCLOPS, THESE ORAL VAPOURS MUST BE PROPERLY FOCUSSED TO ACHIEVE SUCH DEVASTATING EFFECT! NOW, ARMED ONLY WITH HIS QUARTER-LOAF, CAPTAIN FROG IS READY TO FACE LE MONDE (AND OTHER UNREADABLE FOREIGN NEWSPAPERS)!

ALORS! I 'AVE ZE STRENGTH OF A 'UNDRED SACHA DISTELS!

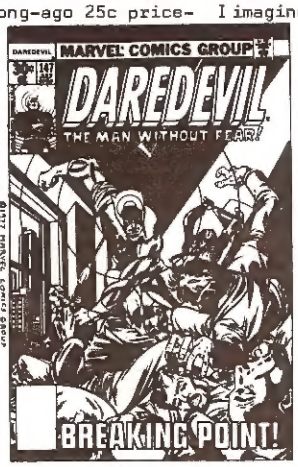
L'ISH PROCHAINE

LARK of TRIUMPH

REG USPATOFF

I mentioned in my last column for this fanzine that I expected DC to increase the price of their 52-page comics from fifty to sixty cents soon--what I didn't do was follow that notion through to the bitter end and forecast that the 30 cent price would also change. Hell, it hardly seems more than a few months since the previous increase!

Obviously, DC knew a few months back that once again they'd be the first comics company to charge more--the Dollar Comic price and page-count is geared to appear good value compared to the new rates, and seemed rather expensive compared with 50 cents for 52 pages, 34 of them story. If you want to pay 35 cents for a comic, buy an ordinary thin title; if you'd rather pay 30c, buy two in one cover at 60c, and if you'd prefer that long-ago 25c price-tag, buy very nearly four comics in one with a Dollar Comic!



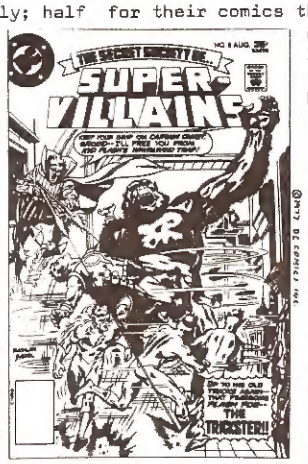
As I said last time, I wish the new 80-page giants had been given square spines; it would make them seem sturdier and more substantial. However, they do have one way of standing out from their more slender brethren; they're just about a quarter of an inch taller, enough, DC hope, for the man with the newstand, the man with a stranglehold on the comics industry, to think he's mixed some other type of magazine in with all those lurid, low-profit kid's comics.

In fact, DC went so far as to enlist the talents of Superman, Wonder Woman and Neal Adams to explain (in comics form, of course) how Mr Wholesaler, and his friend Mr Retailer, could make Big Money out of this new breed of comics; somehow, the Man of Steel and the Amazing Amazon never got round to mentioning black and white comics, which, as supplied by both Marvel and Warren Publishing, have prices of a dollar or more, and are in a standard magazine size, to get along perfectly in the same rack as Playboy or Fortune--for some reason, they've never caught on to any great extent. James Warren, a man for whom I have the greatest possible respect, has steered CREEPY, EERIE, VAMPIRELLA, and the currently invisible SPIRIT to great success, featuring excellent artists from here and Europe; however, CREEPY's latest circulation statement gave an average sale of 86,000 copies, including a grand total of 515 subscribers--and a sales ratio of 55.3%. While that's a sales ratio Jenette Kahn might be tempted to sell her soul for, it's not Success with a capital $! And Marvel's black & white line's looking extremely slender these days.

So, a dollar for a colour comic is not a magic cure-all; it's an idea, an idea that could work, but a lot of formats in past years have, in the end -- failed.

Although the 50-cent price-tag for the 52-page comic-book is vanishing now, this format is still, I'm sure, the best one for the majority of titles. While thinner books exist, especially coming from the same publisher, they can't really prosper --a 35-cent book is always going to sell better than a similar-looking one selling at 60 cents -- so the present situation, where the 52-pagers are having to compete with 36-pagers, can't continue for long. DC and Marvel should co-operate on this, and agree a change-over date; any lack of agreement could damage both companies.

I gather my comments on what a thicker size would mean to comics last time have led to a fair amount of discussion about my conclusions; I would, therefore, like to go into a little more detail. ACTION, I imagine, would remain as a monthly; half the 34 story pages would give room for a Superman story of a useful length, while a couple of 8-page back-ups could feature a rotating roster of JLA members. BATMAN might go bi-monthly, with either a full-length Bat-novel or two quite substantial stories. HOUSE OF SECRETS would just use up the DC inventory of new mystery tales a little quicker. The most popular Marvel titles would, I'm sure, remain monthly, sometimes with full-length stories and sometimes with short back-up tales; however, I can see MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE keeping to the present length for Thing stories, using the second half of the book as a proving ground for new heroes. MARVEL PREMIERE too might gain a regular star in the lead spot, with try-out one-shots in the back, while IRON MAN goes bimonthly, and KULL and RED SONJA combine into one title, as do DAREDEVIL and CAPTAIN MARVEL. If books like SPIDER-MAN continue as monthlies, and others like X-MEN as bimonthlies, then of course there will be cancellations--but CHAMPIONS, GHOST RIDER, 2001, MARVEL SUPER-HEROES, and MASTER OF KUNG FU, for example, would be losses quite soon got used to. If necessary, three titles could be combined into one in some cases.



Both companies have some spare writing capacity at present, and some artists too are not working as much as they'd like. Marvel currently produce around 700 pages a month, which could be increased to 850 I'm sure -- enough for 25 comics a month in the 52-page size. Printing would be no problem, as, while the thicker size has 100% more story pages, it only has 50% more pages in total, as the number of ad pages remains the same.

So, here's a game to play. Which would your 25 Marvels a month be? If 10 of them are monthly and 15 bimonthly, that's 40 books in all; send your answers to Stan Lee, I'm sure he'd be very interested to know what readers think of the idea!

The halls of DC aren't as merry now as they were a month or so ago; it's never nice to be the first firm to put up the price of comics, especially when this price increase is not in conjunction with any increase in the pages of story. So, a 17-page comic story now costs 35 cents from DC, and a double-length JLA story now has a 60-cent price-tag; it's no fun watching your competitors to see if a new SPIDER-MAN costs as much as the latest TEEN TITANS yet; if WHAT IF is as much as BATMAN FAMILY. Casual readers will tend to buy the cheaper product, while staunch DC fans will resent having to pay more for their comics than the Marvelite next door. For five months last year Marvel held the line, selling their books 5 cents cheaper; their profits cannot have been very high, but their circulation figures, and also their reputation and morale, must have climbed. What chance does poor SHADE THE CHANGING MAN have, a new title with only "brand loyalty" going for it, when it's one of the first comics to appear at the price we only used to associate with SPIDEY? A new book like that depends for its initial sales on idle curiosity, no more--and who can afford to be idly curious when you're charged extra for it?

Of course, distribution also plays its part in the success of comics--to our old friends Mr Retailer and Mr Wholesaler any price increase has its good side. These 35 cent comics take up no extra space at all, but half of that extra nickel is for them to share.

If DC, who, as I said earlier, obviously knew for months that this price rise had got to come, had added a single extra page of story to the books, had just replaced one of the four pages of house ads with a page of art, I'd have been resigned to this change. Can you imagine what a small fraction of a cent per copy that would cost? Why, they could scrap every "Shade is Here" or "The New Gods Return" page, leaving only the "free" "Daily Planet", and return to 20 pages of story per book for less than a single cent! Think what a sensation that would have caused, it could have saved the thin format entirely for a year or two. Who would have minded a "35c" flash, if it was surrounded by a slug saying "More Pages! Better Value Than Ever!" Not me, for one. -RU

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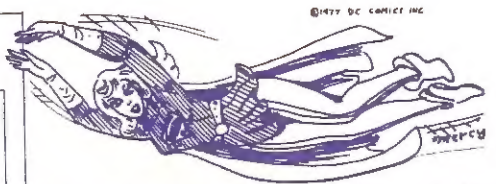
the opinions expressed on this page are exclusively those of Mr Uspatoff; as such, they may not reflect the views of Bem's publisher or other contributors.

KATHOLICITY



So here I am, all of a sudden, with a column of my own. I never asked if I could write a column; Martin never asked if I could write a column either, just told me to think of a title or he'd get Nige Edwards to do it. Hastily, I thought of a title. The word 'catholicity' means a broad view of a subject; spelt with a K, it means a broad's view of, in this instance, mythology in the comics.

I used to be fond of reading books on myth and legend, and when I took, or rather returned, to reading comics I was displeased at some of the liberties taken with the gods and heroes. I know comics mythology is meant to be different, but in some cases I think they'd have got a better story sticking to the original versions--though the Comics Code Authority mightn't have agreed.

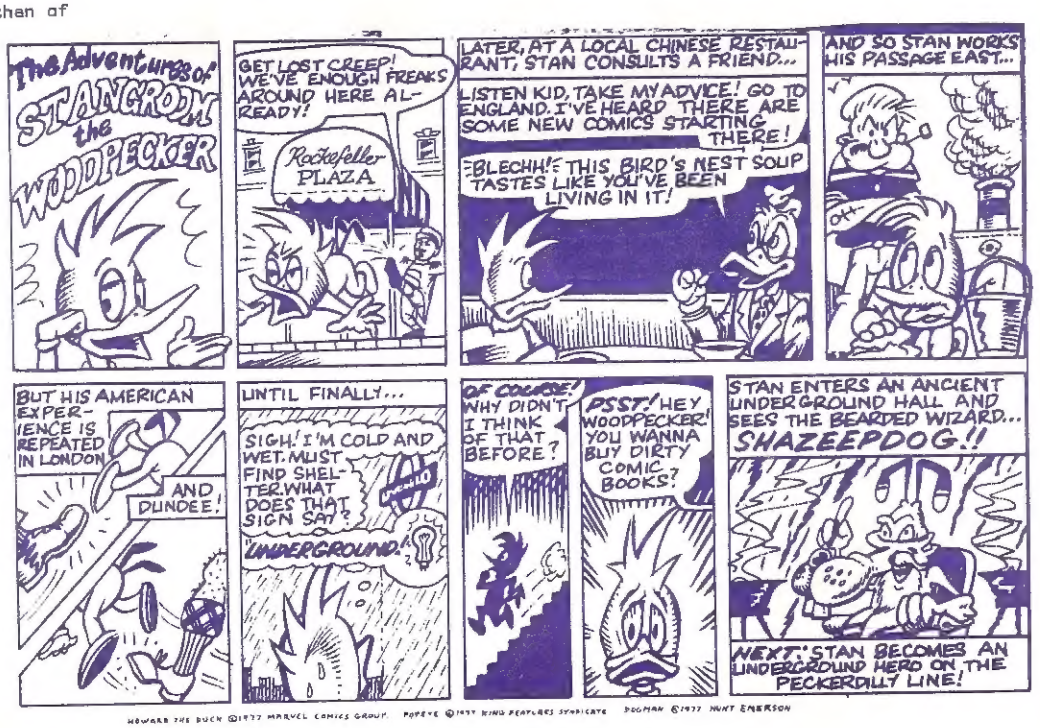
Take Wonder Woman. The whole story of the origin of Wonder Women and the Amazons is fishy in the extreme, if you know anything about the legendary characters involved. (Of course, the origin story is always as told by Queen Hippolyta, who may have had her reasons for not making a True Confession of it.) The Amazons (the name means one-breasted, and the comic-book versions all seem to have two) had nothing to do with Aphrodite, for one thing. Aphrodite, a right little raver who was more of a Goddess of Sex than of Love, wasn't given to guarrelling with Ares--she was in fact somewhat more than just good friends with him. And with many others, from Adonis through to Zeus; the only man or god she didn't much fancy was her husband, Hephaestus.

And she is supposed to have built an island where no men are allowed, and called it Paradise? Then there is the improbable conduct of the Greeks when they conquer the Amazons, chain them up, make slaves of them, and force them to...scrub the floors and wash the dishes? Tarl Cabot would blush for them. Now in legendary times the Greeks didn't have a word for it--homosexuality only became fashionable later. And this bunch was led by Hercules, all of whose appetites were phenomenal. This illegitimate son of Zeus (In all his comics appearances, Herc is described as being the child of a mortal wife of Zeus. His mother was certainly a mortal wife -- her husband was a mortal too. Zeus, the original dirty old deity, could change his shape, and tricked her by assuming the form of her spouse. I ask you, would Chameleon Boy ever pull a low trick like that?) inherited his papa's amorous propensities in full. One of his lesser-known labours was when he deflowered the 50 daughters of King Daneus in one night, getting them all pregnant. The king, who must have been a bit of a lad himself in his time (though nothing on King Priam of Troy, who had 50 daughters and 50 sons) asked him to do this, as he had no sons of his own and wanted some strong grandsons to fight his battles. And we are asked to believe that all he did to Hippolyta was hit her on the jaw with her own girdle? If you ask me, Wonder Woman inherited the strength of Hercules direct -- or would you rather go on believing that unlikely 'clay statue' story?

Then there's Thor. There is a damn good reason why Thor never mentioneth his mother. Odin's wife, the only wife he ever had, was called Frigga. Thor's mother was named either Brgyndis, Jord, or Hlodyn, and was a giantess whose father owned a sizable treasure. When the young Odin came by to try to steal the said treasure (Odin's main characteristic was a quite appalling greed) whatever-her-name-was took a fancy to him, and in reverse of the usual procedure offered him money (half her dad's gold) if he would surrender his all. Odin, who would do anything for gold, agreed at once, and later, when she was asleep, made off with all the gold. Two years and nine months later, an uncommonly strong and articulate toddler arrived at Odin's house, bashed the door in, and demanded maintenance from his father in a voice clearly audible all over Asgard. Odin, to shut him up, hastily made the kid god of thunder. When he grew up, he spent most of his time eating, getting drunk, and fighting--just like Hercules, in fact, except that Thor was only unfaithful to his wife once or twice. Herc was invariably unfaithful to his wives (he had three at different times in his mortal life, and on deification wed his half-sister Hebe. All the gods were given to incest) and actually killed one of them --he used to have occasional mad fits.

Isis' hobbies included murder, black magic, and necrophily, and should not be discussed in polite society. Of course, this isn't polite society, but I suspect I'm running out of space. Damn, I meant to work in one of the witty limericks what I write. Next time I will! You have been warned, Lock -- this is what happens when you give me a column. I'm sorry I took so long with it -- would you believe the Dreaded Deadline Doom? Would you believe that, as I was flipping through the last Bem my eye fell on the words "Kirby gets Conan", and I fell into a fainting fit which lasted a week? What would you believe, so that I can use it next time?

-KATHLEEN GLANCY


The Adventures of STANGROOM the WOODPECKER
GET LOST CREEP! WE'VE ENOUGH FREAKS AROUND HERE ALREADY!
Rockefeller PLAZA
LATER, AT A LOCAL CHINESE RESTAURANT, STAN CONSULTS A FRIEND...
LISTEN KID, TAKE MY ADVICE! GO TO ENGLAND. I'VE HEARD THERE ARE SOME NEW COMICS STARTING THERE!
-BLECHH! THIS BIRD'S NEST SOUP TASTES LIKE YOU'VE BEEN LIVING IN IT!
AND SO STAN WORKS HIS PASSAGE EAST...
BUT HIS AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IS REPEATED IN LONDON
AND DUNDEE!
UNTIL FINALLY...
SIGH! I'M COLD AND WET. MUST FIND SHELTER. WHAT DOES THAT SIGN SAY?
UNDERGROUND!
OF COURSE! WHY DIDN'T I THINK OF THAT BEFORE?
PSST! HEY WOODPECKER! YOU WANNA BUY DIRTY COMIC BOOKS?
STAN ENTERS AN ANCIENT UNDERGROUND HALL AND SEES THE BEARDED WIZARD...
SHAZEEPDOG!!
NEXT: STAN BECOMES AN UNDERGROUND HERO ON THE PECKERDILLY LINE!

HOWARD THE DUCK ©1977 MARVEL COMICS GROUP. POPEYE ©1977 KING FEATURES SYNDICATE. DOGMAN ©1977 HUNT EMERSON

REACTION

Dear Martin,

WHAT'S THIS? Kathleen Glancy's got her own column? Frzyxskltpynmrwstflkx1457*@! You never offered me a column! Ah well--congrats, Kath... (Gnash, seethe...)

Actually I was a bit confused by this. Is it just an edited letter basically? Only I couldn't follow the intro, or the sequence of the thing. The 'dialectic variations' bit is presumably in response to my remark in re Moon Knight's name-calling; with reference to which I must confess that I hadn't considered the possibility of variations of meaning like that, though I ought to have done really, bearing in mind the way the word "bugger" seems to have become accepted in US comic mags. But I don't think it's necessarily to the point in this instance. The prejudice was real enough, surely; and the point I was making is that it's a bad precedent to set, isn't it?

Anyway, I loved the Supershrink stuff! (Did I do what while I was reading it??! ..THUMP.) And, kidding aside, if there's any letterhack around who really deserves their own col, I'd say it's Kath. (Aside to Kath: You don't suppose you could put in a word for me, do you? What? Er, no--that wasn't quite the word I had in mind!)

-K. Williams, Redhill

Dear Martin and lackies,

The old Bem always seemed to be having to struggle to keep all its features, art, columns and articles in, like a fat man trying to hold in his stomach! So, with more pages you can really let it all hang out! I just hope you and the other guys (sorry, persons, Ms Glancy!) don't get arrested for doing so...

The news as always was a mixture of bad and good, with DC seeming to have the most interesting stuff--those 31 and 50c books sound like magazines to really sink your teeth into. It doesn't take much guessing to figure out Chris Ash's favourite DC hero, does it? Can't say I ever cared much for Captain Nuts, so perhaps it's time for another complete change, eh? I really enjoyed Rich M's informal dialogue, any chance of seeing him give a similar type of report on an American Con/Mart? Captain Frog...er, I'll reserve comment I think!

I liked Nige's Howard interview too, even though I read it in rough draft, at least a dozen times. "Read this bit, Pete, and tell me what you think" he was saying every time I saw him. But Nige polished it up and it came across well -- he's no Robin Day though, is he? Hey, hey, a Kath Glancy page complete with a picture of Kath in her black leathers! I like it, I really do... I'd like to see her write a couple of articles one of these days, though--in fact, how about an in-depth one on Terl Cabot, Kathleen? Tut, tut...such language!

I missed seeing one of Hunter Tremayne's vignettes this time round, but I suppose he's busy with his own fanzine; we lost Howard Stangroom the same way, but since Nameless Zine is almost dead we've gained Edwards...that's a good deal?? About that Weird Trash thing in Penny, I told Jack we should have published it ourselves but he wouldn't listen -- editors, not a half brain between the lot of them (present company excepted, of course)! If I can get hold of a duplicator I'll edit and print the next WT myself (Jack steps down for an ish); I'm thinking about another CMN spoof with a fake interview with Stan Lee, Jenette Kahn and Jim Warren--you can imagine what it will be like! But since I'll be working eight days a week during the tourist season in Brid on the beach, the mag might not come out till winter.

Reviews seemed a bit dated, but were interesting; I can't understand that K. "Killer" Williams though, Nick Fury by Starlin & Chaykin and he doesn't like it! I'm sure that guy would find fault with a comic by Neal Adams and Jim Steranko! Just the same, he's a good reviewer... for a nutter. (Right, Nige, pay me the money for insulting Swilliams now.) Oh, man! I just noticed! Over the page, K has a good word for Kirby's Black Panther! You sure it's not time for his thousand-mile check-up?

So, you're having a page on the good stuff "Made in Britain" are you? That should take up about 25 words or less... Ruan likes "Action", does he? "Plenty to read" he says--sure, if you're a masochist that is! It's a pretty dire publication; I think I'd rather read the Champions or Ms Marvel, and that should tell you how I feel! I admit though that 2000 A.D. from the same company sounds kinda intriguing --but "the new Dan Dare"? I doubt it will bring a smile to the lips of any Frank Hampson fans... I'll probably buy a copy just the same, just so I can have the perverse pleasure of tearing it to shreds.

-Pete April, Filey, near Bridlington

That's what I like about you, Pete -- you always end on such an "up" note! Give the poor devils a chance first...and then kick them to death! -Nige

Dear Martin,

Kathleen Glancy writing a spot in Bem? Egad, I suppose it had to happen, with all those incisive letters she's been writing. Her column raised a smile or two, as per usual. More, please! Apart from that, there wasn't anything else particularly earth-shaking in the latest Bem. Why is everybody slagging Gerry Conway, suddenly? I quite liked him, myself--especially on the Metal Men.

The fanzine scene is livening up a bit -- all these GOOD zines being produced. YANCY STREET JOURNAL will bear watching; I enjoyed it quite a lot, actually -- the articles were very well written & thought out, the printing and layout superb--what more could one ask? Unfortunately, that question is not rhetorical. The art was singularly awful, especially the front cover; the only thing slick about that was the paper it was printed on (SO THERE, Ed Sallis!). (I wonder if they'll let me contribute, now?) I guess the poses were quite good, but they were executed badly, to my taste.

-Trevor Phoenix, London SE4

Dear Martin,

Hello there! Really nice to see a copy of Bem after that long wait--a very enjoyable read it was too, even although I never buy more than 10 mags a month now!

The new logo -- excellent! Keep it. The Howard interview was the best thing Nige has done--genuine humour...in places! No, really it was very funny.

One bad thing about Bem-12--the page 4 "Funnies" are no longer funny. I think they've become an in-joke to the artists & writers, like Inspector Clouseau. What a pity--Mighty Man had such promise! But Captain Frog? I can't wait! He sounds like the saving of the funnies page--and I've already passed my French "O" level so I'm OK there!

Loved that small bit of art on page 27 --more, please, from Nick Neocleous -- a pseudonym if ever I saw one! Pardon me if I'm wrong, Nick.

Kathleen Glancy -- oh yes! I like it, I like it! She ought to get the whole mag, leaving only space for "Reaction" and "Fan-Things", plus some art. Now, that would be my ideal Bemusing. Well, I can always dream...

-Don MacLeod, Dingwall, Ross-shire

If I can't have an editorial, no chance!

Dear Martin,

I must comment on your "Tale-Enders"; I find it really boring, I read the same in so many other zines that...well, I hope you understand. I like the personal stuff, which was in abundance this issue, such as "Rich Morrissey's England", which was very nice. I think it was at Comicon '76 that I heard a rumour about you going on "Pebble Mill At One", please tell me if this is true. All in all, a pleasant issue --but what do I see in 'Reaction'? My art is GOOD? Faint -- unhhh...

-Christophe Ta-min, Harrogate

It was Phil Clarke who was in danger of explaining comics to "Pebble Mill At One" --I gather he's making a full recovery, though. I'm not ready to become a star of stage, screen & radio yet!

Dear Martin,

Thanks for Bem-12, it was great. There were many things I liked, but alas there were some that didn't quite hit a clear note. The art was quite good. I see my friend B. Bonhomme got his art published, well it was inevitable. The lettercol was good, and 'Tale-Enders' is still ranking up there at the top.

Now to the things I don't like. The HTD interview wasn't very funny -- it didn't even give me a smile. Kathleen Glancy bored me, and Fan-Things was run of the mill. But don't be disheartened, Bem is doing fine.

Now onto something rather boring, but I think it should be discussed. Marvel have recently pushed out most of the feeling that made them so popular in the sixties. Only people who have a regard for their readers are really holding most panelologists in, now most of them are going. Gerber is now only employed at Marvel because of the popularity of Howard the Duck; Englehart is finished at Marvel; and such greats as Starlin, Brunner and other artists have been pushed about to the extent that they don't know where to turn now. Marvel are slipping into a slump which they maybe don't understand--and my faith in Marvel dropped to an all-time low when Warlock was discontinued.

Well, that's enough of that.

-Martin Noone, Harlow

Dear Martin,

thanx for bem, didn't see 11 but i was impressed by this issue. nice to see kathleen g. in action in her own column, always one of the most interesting letter writers. other highpoints? well how about wonder woman busting out all over on pg5? no, ah well i did like ruan's column on brit comics, always nice to see any support for the undergrounds. the art wasn't of a high standard & you seem to use a tremendous amount of little boring & meaningless swipes, come on kids be original. all in all bem is fine for a newcomer to comics or someone who doesn't mind accepting them for what they are. i can't, sorry to say, & at the moment I don't see myself ever doing so...but thanx anyway, as i say i was impressed by the neatness & layouts, but do try to go a bit deeper, eh?

-al matheson, 12 langwell cres, wick

a capital suggestion, al... There is no point in Bem becoming another comix plus though, so the main emphasis will remain on Marvel, DC, and the superhero--but who knows what else will creep in now & then?

Dear Martin,

Bem-12 was great (or should I say is?). The extra pages made a helluva difference, I loved Chris Ash's drawing of Jenette Kahn, and also the Howard the Duck interview. Keep up the good work!

By the way, has anyone got GL/GA #s 78-83, or STRANGE ADVENTURES #s 209, 210, 214-216, because I need them badly--but, considering I have THREE copies of GL/GA #76, I'm not too unhappy.

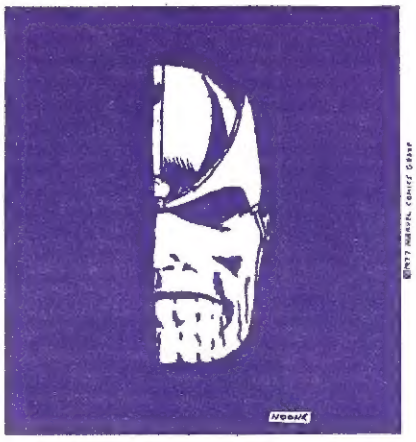
-Suhail Akhtar, Crookham Road, Fulham, London SW6 4EG

Well, you may get some trade offers, then; in fact, the queue's already halfway down the street, if you look outside...

Dear Martin,

Thanks for the latest Bem. On first impression it's a much larger package--until you start counting how many ad pages there are. ((Eh? ALL the extra 8 pages were text; like Bem-11, Bem-12 had only 5 pages of ads, making an increase in the "editorial" content of over 50%! -ML)) Still, it's very cheap, and good value compared to some other magazines on the market, even ones that cover comics and sword & sorcery! Looking over this ish, I think you're short of an article, a Mike Cruden-type analytical passage or some such. Even so, Bem is easily my favourite fanzine--there's something annoying about Penny which I can't quite define, but it is noticeably absent in Bem.

Lettercols are always my favourite part of fanzines--apart from the fact that they can (but don't always) act as a platform to voice complaints or vociferous opinions on a certain topic, they also have an



appeal more universal than much else in a comics fanzine. People like debates; they like ramblings on all manner of topics, so long as they don't get too technical. Lettercols are a great way to win converts to fandom; Marc Baines (of Comixine) and I thought of producing a lettercol zine, unfortunately we had to shelve the idea because of our respective regular zines, but maybe someone else would like to take up the idea?

So Kathleen Glancy's written the Counter Earth -- ahem -- "Crew" off as a bunch of Warlock fans, eh? Too true! Marc Baines and I both cover all our walls with Warlock posters, we have five copies of every Warlock mag published, and we just adore our full-sized High Evolutionary pin-up. We're thinking of building a big rocket and flying to Counter-Earth--could Kathleen loan us some money for this great project? If she came along, she could analyse the true motives of the H.E. when he turned all those dumb animals into intelligent, semi-human beings.

Well, K.G. stated what she thought of the name 'Counter-Earth Crew', now I'll say what I think of it. It smacks of ego-tripping pretentiousness--straight out of the early fanzine days of 'egoboo' (ego boosting to you, kiddies). It's not only confined to Marc Baines and I, though--kindly drop the "Crew", we never put that in and it's the most offending part--it's a symptom of the "Marvel Mania" that the British zine scene seems to have suffered from. I'm afraid Marvel now are breeding a type of comic fans who are thoroughly anti-DC from the start, and thoroughly anti-Marvel once they discover what crap they've been reading--which means they'll become anti-comics. Enough, that's just my hypothesis--what do the rest of you think?

I'm in full agreement with Paul Gravett about the possibility of a massive slump in the comics industry. I think that, with the short-sighted, ultra-commercial type of attitude of the big two at the moment, the ultimate effect must be even further reductions in sales, which will lead to a reduction in titles, which in turn will lead to a reduction in staff, a whittling away of the less popular. Subsequently, I think we shall see just a few of the best comic writers and artists working on a few innovative titles -- possibly in the new dollar format -- and returning the fast-fading credibility to this medium. The comics industry may be dying (debatable?) but I can foresee a phoenix rising from the ashes of Jack Kirby and company.

Meanwhile, as comics go through this anti-creative period (the future lies with DC, but not for a couple of years yet, I imagine), what's going to happen to fandom? It's flourishing à-ce-moment, but then it always takes some time for the reaction to set in. I imagine that Mike Cruden, in "Cursives" and F. Trader, will have nothing to say but nostalgia shortly. Newszines in particular must suffer--maybe we're all doomed! Optimism is the only way out--let's have page 4 spilling into page 5! Howard the Duck lives! And so on. Jolly Jack just ain't capturing the attention of the nation any more...McGregor's fired ...the escape is in humour, so I suggest you buy a permanent leash for Nige Edwards --you may need him!

Keep "bemusing" us for a long time to come, Martin!

-Mark Bilsborough, Deepcar, Sheffield

I'll certainly do my best, Mark--and you keep CROM coming, too! And Nige is quite happy with his current leash -- it's real sheepskin, of course...

Dear Martin,

Nice to see Bem again. I love chatty, informal fan-type articles like the Rich Morrissey job. Great stuff! I suppose I'll have to like ol' Nige Edwards' piece, since I contributed something to it -- us hacks have gotta stick together! Kathleen Glancy is becoming quite a famous lady. You'll have to do a centre-fold of her. She's one of the few femmes in fandom who keeps on pluggin'. I love that delightful sexist illo beside her name! She doesn't really dress like da Black Widow, huh?

Paul Gravett's letter was interesting on several counts. He echoes almost to a "T" the route I took myself, the discovery & enthusiasm for the real classics of comic art. Somebody turn him on to Krazy Kat, too! And Little Nemo, and Dave Sheridan, and the many amazing cartoonists old & new around the world! Yeah, turn him on to me! Get in early folks and watch me develop!

Seriously though, it's only a matter of time before DC and Marvel begin to pall, and we all get a bit more discriminating.

-Harry McAvinchey, Armagh

Dear Bem,

I was really amazed at the quality of your fanzine, as most such fan mags are full of a load of pretentious and empty words, but yours really seems to have something to say. I guess the latest comics depression, particularly with Marvel, makes us all feel that comics have reached their peak and are on their way down, particularly since the undauntably enthusiastic and inventive mind of Stan Lee has given up comics writing. Yet you seem to have so much information and insight into the US comics scene that you show new ideas, movements and life in the industry. It makes me wonder if there is, after all, some hope for the future of Marvel and DC.

I loved Captain Frog and the Howard the Duck interview. They were really up to Gerber's standards. Roll over Marvel!

-Stephen Billing, Rayleigh

I'm sure there is a future for comics, Stephen--and I'm glad that Bem managed to communicate that feeling. This is a time when drastic decisions are needed, though; I hope that they'll be the right ones...

Dear Martin,

Firstly, about Bem #12. I'm no expert on fanzines, but compared with the average 'zine it was quite good. I especially liked the format; however, the art was pretty dull on the whole, and only Leslie Stannage, Greg Chown, and Phil Elliott's illo on page 20 saved the zine. "Page 4 Funnies" was boring -- I've read articles about chartered accountancy that were funnier! However, I thought the Howard the Duck interview was hilarious, as was Kathleen Glancy's feature.

By the way, Bem is supposed to be your zine, right? The only features you wrote in Bem #12 were 'Tale-Enders', the 'News' section, and the editorial. Still, I suppose recently your time has been taken up with coping with moving into Worcester.

My last comment on Bem #12 is that I was glad to see that your reviews were done by several different people. This means you aren't stuck with reading a review section by one person who may have different views about what makes a good comic-book to the views you yourself have.

In Reg Uspatoff's column he said the 30c format cannot have any future. Perhaps this is true for many books, but there are some that have a good future ahead of them.

For the rest, there are two possible courses open; cancellation or new formats. If each title was given a 50c or dollar format, then they would have to be published bimonthly, or even quarterly -- as Reg said, DC, Marvel etc cannot double their output per month. This cut in the frequency wouldn't be a good idea -- but what other alternative is there? Easy: cancel about half the titles. Once again, Reg pointed out that this would give the remaining titles better display, thereby boosting their sales. Also, there would be less titles to buy and read; this means that people like me wouldn't be so "out of touch" with all the titles published now, because many of them simply wouldn't exist any more.

The final result of cancellations is that the writers and artists would probably have more time to concentrate on the books remaining, leading to a higher quality of story and art, which is what most fans seem to want at the moment.

-Nigel Squires, Worcester

As editor of Bem, I don't have to write every page--a dozen pages by me every two or so months would get a bit monotonous, I fear--rather, my task is to assemble work by the best possible contributors. Where else can you find Kathleen, Ruan, Chris, Ed, Nige and Reg all in one zine, under my watchful editorial eye? Almost any old fanzine has its quota of Emlock...

Dear Sir or Biped,

Would you please not malign N. Edwards in your letter columns any more. He is a fine person (and a brilliant writer) who has not got a fixation about sheep--and, besides, the charges were all dropped, they could never prove anything. He does not run the holiday camp for sheep either --that is handled by his uncle (the most incredible TC). Edwards' main duty is organising the indoor& outdoor activities for the women (under 18 and buxom section). Hoping this puts you straight (or if not, keep seeing the doctor).

-A. Ewe, Overthere, Comehere, NOW 967

Thank you, Ewe, I couldn't agree with you more, Edwards never touched those sheep; and as for the women, it could have been anyone! Yes, you are quite right in saying he is brilliant, "genius" is the word I'd use for this utterly wonderful writer... ((You're trying to pull the wool over our eyes again, Edwards! The readers can tell when you're answering the letters! -ML)) Sorry, Boss, Sir -- I guess it's back to the doghouse now, isn't it? -Nige

Dear Martin,

Did you realise that H the D appeared in no less than eight illustrations--has the world gone quackers?

"Mighty Man" and "Captain Nuts" seem to have run out of ideas; Chris Ash, however, turns in his best strip yet, in my opinion.

"Rich Morrissey's England" was fairly interesting, but what was the point of it all? I suppose it gives the zine a more fannish touch, though. "The Nige Edwards Interview" had some good moments--I felt it could have been cut a little, though.

"Reaction" is getting better with each issue; Paul Gravett knocks English apathy (one of our great traditions, but at least we're consistent!), but there are hardly any decent professional outlets now for serious comic strips. He also complains about the non-acceptance of comics in this country, which is quite right -- I think the pathetic television serials must take a large part of the blame for this.

I was pleased to see Nigel doing some serious reviews again. Besides having good taste, he always seems to be enjoying the comics he reviews.

-Jerry Rees, Old Catton, Norwich

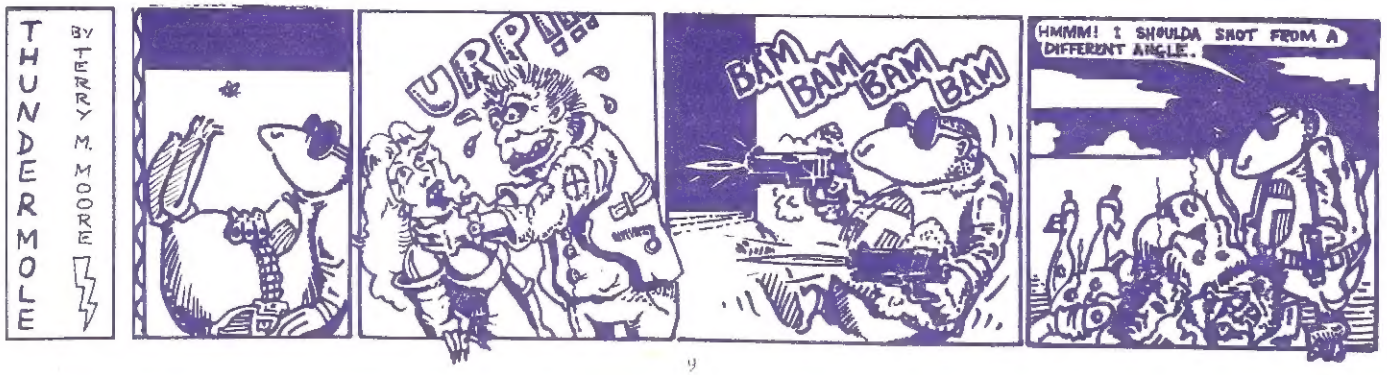
Dear Martin,

Every week, in all forms of media, we hear of hundreds of assorted clubs and societies concerned with any number of crazy hobbies and activities. So, isn't it about time for British fandom to form itself into some sort of national association? At the very least, it could be a form of federation for the numerous local clubs, fanzines, and dealers which already exist; it could also produce a truly national fanzine combining all the sources of news, comments and art in Britain.

Such a national society ("British Comix Fans Society"?) could provide a central liaison service for information; arrange comic marts and conventions; give perhaps a cheaper import service; arrange deals between collectors; and more. No doubt such ideas have been mooted before, but a new club, formally established at this summer's Comicon, seems to be a necessary institution for the ever-expanding, ever-exploitable British fandom. Well...?

-Barry K. Winetrobe, Glasgow

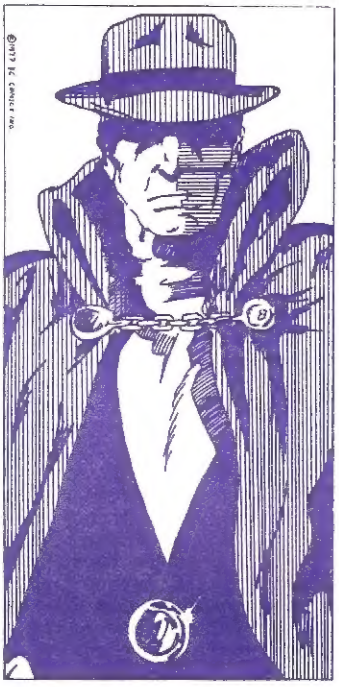
The British Fantasy Society provides that sort of service for horror & fantasy fans, and has to charge £3 per annum membership. But it's a good idea, Barry, and is bound to happen. How about "British Entertainment Media & United States Inter-fan National Group"? Love those initials! But what do other readers think of the idea?



Dear Martin,

I'd like to make some additions to "Made In Britain"--ones nobody else would think of. Firstly, there's those pocket-size comics. Oh sure, most of them are instantly dispensable (war & romance) but, tucked away among all the rest are a few western titles, some of which have contained art by Arturo del Castillo, who I think is the world's greatest western comics artist. Secondly, "Tiger" and "Roy of the Rovers". Yes, I know both are sports-oriented, and aimed at a sub-15 year old age-group, but each contain about 18 pages of generally excellent strips, plus pin-ups, articles and features, and are well worth 7p each.

Moving on now to other things, I'm glad to see someone put into words my own thoughts on what would happen if Marvel and DC abandon the 36 page format, which they must do if comics are to survive in America. Reg Uspatoff notwithstanding, comics will continue outside the USA -- what few people seem to realise is that in Europe (especially the less literate nations such as France, Spain and Italy), South America, and most of Africa, comics are incredibly popular.



A while back, somewhere I read that as fans mature they move from Marvel to DC to Warren -- this was meant to betoken some sort of increasing "awareness" on the part of fans. Not so: the answer is much simpler. Most comics fans turn to Marvel first because their comics are the easiest to obtain in Britain -- it's even possible to achieve continuity, and collect them issue by issue. The sporadic, partial distribution of DC comics is enough to put anyone off! Eventually, though, many enjoy at least some DC comics enough to put up with this, and put a little extra effort into finding missing issues. As for Warrens, well buying them is a joke. Even if you can find them (very difficult outside London) who can afford them? I hope that other readers will add to these comments...please?

-David A. Simpson, Aberdeen

Dear Martin and Nige,

At the moment Marvel seem to be in the process of digging their own grave; the final straw has been the cut in distribution down to 20 titles at 12p. I used to be, until about six months ago, one of those people who, as Paul D! Gravett says in Reaction, bought any comics produced by Marvel. However, because of the poor distribution, I cannot find the DC comics I want -- better distribution seems to be Marvel's main advantage.

Cut-backs must come in the comparatively near future for both main companies, and instead of a huge number of comics being churned out, we'll see a small number of titles containing material superior to that being published now.

I've just had an intriguing thought--fanzines are improving while comics are deteriorating, what if, instead of buying comics, more people bought fanzines?

"Captain Frog" looks great. Other strip heroes could include Williams-man (When you walk through the door...), Captain Wales (Why not?), and, from Bem-12's "Page 4 Funnies", Stangroom the Woodpecker.

-Matthew Moorcroft, nr Warrington

No Captain Wales I'm afraid, and Keith --er, K--Williams refused the ol' cosmic ray treatment...but, at great expense and no little personal risk, Chris Ash is now bringing us the stirring, sentimental saga of Stangroom the Woodpecker!

Dear Martin,

I have been giving much thought to the 2nd half of Reg Uspatoff's column; I am thinking of the possible effects of the rise in price of comics. Looking at the statement of ownership notices in the March Marvels, we see that comic sales are still falling, with only the X-Men improving its sales ratio, by 0.91%. The worst sales ratio drop was on Captain America -- 6.64%, which must be good news to all Kirby haters. A further decline could mean bye-bye Jack; of course, it could also mean bye-bye Captain America.

Raising the price of all comics to 50 cents could mean either the salvation of the comics industry, or a continuing decline of sales, and possible death. In the first case, if, as Reg predicts, there will be a cut-back in the number of comics by a combination of titles, there will of course be a rise in the sales of remaining comics -- but also the rise in price may encourage retailers to order more comics in their unceasing urge to make money, so that the distribution situation would improve. The new pricing structure might be 50c for the standard titles, £1.00 for giants, £1.50 for black & whites, and £2.00 for treasuries.

In the second case, if the mass comic-buying public (roughly 8-14 year olds) decided that 50 cents was too much for a comic, then of course sales would continue to decline, and there'd be a reversion to the slimmer format, with the page-count continuing to drop. If that does happen, it won't be long before someone cries (to quote Jim Warren), "Sell off the comics--liquidate!"

Of course, if inflation continues to run riot, we could see the 50c comic shrinking as the 10c one did, and in ten years we'd be in the same position as we are now.

-Neil Jackson, London NW10

Dear Martin,

Thanks for Bem #12. Up to its highly competent standard as usual.

Fan editors & dealers don't often write letters to zines do they? The best way of getting them to do so is to have some derogatory comments printed about them. PAN #7's dealer article has provoked response from Alan Austin, Colin Campbell, etc. Epistolary should be good in #8! And so has it happened with Eddie's Fan-Things, as I take a break from typing, writing etc -- actually, I'm lying in bed recovering from a very strenuous ski-ing holiday where a fiend skewered my head with his ski stick and I covered the white slopes with red. It wasn't serious, I'm more concerned about the bruises all up my legs and bum from many spectacular falls.

Anyway, Alan Matheson gave me the material of Weird Trash #4 because he could not afford to print them in Comics Plus, having a restricted page count. I thought the stuff was terrific, and had to be published--Alan & I thought it would be a nice surprise for Jack & Co if it appeared unexpectantly in PAN. Eddy was wrong in saying it was complete & ready for print -- half of it was still in pencil and it was basically a lot of ideas that needed sorting out and re-typing. The material was not 'cannibalised' -- most of it was printed word for word, very little was excluded, and PAN readers adored it! Many requests have come forth for it to appear every issue.

I don't know if Jack & Co have been offended by the fact I used their stuff, and/or because I titled it Weird Trash #4 (which is what it was for Heaven's Sake) but they haven't said a word to me about it--have they to Ed or is he merely speculating? I'm sure if the alternative of it not appearing at all in print had occurred, then The Mob would have been upset. If I'm at fault for not informing them, then I will feel suitably chagrined, but until I hear from the authors themselves, I won't know.

It boils down to whether one should use passed on material. I was in trouble once for printing grotty old artwork by Trev Goring (drawn in 1970 when he wasn't too good) whose work had improved vastly, I was given it by Nick Knowles, who was starting a fanzine but it never got off the ground. He had got it from Paul Hudson (ECCO, not Glimpse, Paul) after his fanzine, ECCO, collapsed in 1969. In this case I was a naughty boy for printing it, but I thought it was rather good artwork at the time.

Blackmail time. I've got unpublished artwork over 7 years old by Tim Bennion and Trev Goring, and articles by Jon Harvey and Pete Gilham -- originally submitted for E.C.C.O. How much am I offered by you gentlemen for not printing them?

-George Barnett, Mytchett, Surrey

If I understand Ed's column last issue correctly, "Weird Trash #4" was to be a take-off of Comic Fandom Bulletin, and the material you published was taken from this--as published, partially due to the format, it seemed to be a spoof of Panny, and as such was rather far from the mark. And Nige did read and approve Ed's column before it was published. Anyway, thanks for writing, George (and everyone else!) --come back again next time!

WHAT IF #2 (April)
"What If the Hulk Had Always Had Bruce Banner's Brain" by Roy Thomas, Herb Trimpe & Tom Sutton.

I was a bit more tolerant of the first issue than fellow-reviewer Swilliams last time, but I'm afraid this issue has worn out my patience. It's a rather silly tale with quite a few questionable twists like the sudden calm understanding of General Thunderbolt Ross, who was always a "kill now, ask questions later" sort of fellow. The shock ending is exactly that...you're shocked because it's so dumb! So far the What Ifs have been very trivial (Spidey has teamed up with various members of the FF, and in the early days for a short time the Hulk did have Banner's brain), so how about something more bold, like What If Dr Doom killed the FF and ruled the world?

Trimpe is the star here, and it looks to me as if he did the inking himself up to page 35, where Sutton takes over.

I said the novelty could wear off pretty fast, didn't I? -Nige P. Edwards

DR STRANGE #22 (April)
"Mind Trip" by Wolfman & Nebres

This comic gets off to a good start with a magnificent cover by the one and only Frank Brunner; it's a pity the inside art isn't so good. When Rudy Nebres worked on the Shang-Chi series in Deadly Hands, at first I rather liked his art. But from then on, every time I saw work by him it appeared just...plain, and now boring is the word for it. The best art of his this time is the splash panel; but from then on, with few exceptions, it appears very rushed and scratchy. One thing in particular that I hate is the way that Rudy inks Clea's hair.

I'm afraid the story wasn't a great deal better. Marv must have been pressed for a script, because he used the same idea that Steve Englehart did, in the Shuma-Gorath saga. The growth in Clea's brain is too like the part in the Ancient One's brain which became Shuma-Gorath. Ah well, after a Jim Starlin masterminded issue next time (yey!) Claremont will write for a while, then Starlin will write! Now, if only Jim Starlin or Frank Brunner would draw, this would be an excellent book! -Ken Moore

SUPERMAN #311 (May)
"Plague of the Antibiotic Man"
by Pasko, Swan & Springer

Martin Pasko contributes another good Superman story, featuring not only a superhero guest star (Flash), but also a menace from Krypton's past that threatens Central City, and more developments in the compelling Clark/Lois relationship. The only way to improve this strip would be possibly to let Steve Englehart have a crack at it. -Allan J. Palmer

ETERNALS #11 (May)
"The Russians Are Coming" by
Jack Kirby & Mike Royer

Indeed they are, along with more action in Olympia, as the Fourth Host continues exploration of Earth. In the space available the saga unfolds enjoyably enough, but surely a change to a monthly 50c size would helo this series no end? It is after all one of the most innovative books around at the moment. -Adrian R. Last

BLACK LIGHTNING #2 (May)
"Merlyn Means Murder" by Tony Isabella,
Trevor von Eeden, & Frank Springer

Living up to the promise shown in its first issue, Tony Isabella's new creation strikes again. A good blend of action and relevance makes it superior to much produced in the comic media, and to a good percentage of similar television fare. As it's Surprise Month at DC, there's a special former Batman foe appearing, in addition to Merlyn the Archer from JLA #94. The artwork is very good--DC have a winner in Trevor von Eeden. -AJP

OMEGA THE UNKNOWN #8 (May)
"A Blast From the Past" by Roger
Stern, Lee Elias & Jim Mooney

Like Scott Edelman in Omega #7, Roger Stern cannot take the place of Steve Gerber. Omega becomes just another superhero who spends most of his time slugging it out with the villain, and Gerber's interesting sub-plots are dropped in favour of this. If I didn't know Steve was returning next issue, I'd be feeling very negative about this series; as it is I'm tolerant of this fill-in pot-boiler, and eagerly awaiting Steve's triumphant come-back. Now that's what I call a happy ending! -Nige P. Edwards

BATMAN #287 (May)
"Batman-Ex -- As in Extinct" by David
V. Reed, Mike Grell & Bob Wiacek

The Penguin is not one of my favourite Bat-villains -- surely nobody could look like that (don't you believe it! -NPE)-- but here he is again, handled as well as possible. Batman wonders why various prehistoric (mechanical) birds are menacing Gotham, while Pengy commits an assortment of cryptically clued crimes. The question is, why didn't the fiendish fowl do away with Bats when he had the chance? Answers same Bat-comic, next Bat-issue. The Mike Grell art is eminently passable--in fact, he's my third-favourite Bat-artist, behind Giordano and, of course, Adams. Altogether a nicely produced issue, well worth a perusal! -Laurence Bowkett

RED SONJA #3 (May)
"The Games of Gita" by Roy Thomas,
Clara Noto & Frank Thorne

Being somewhat of a Male Chauvinist Pig (Kath Glancy take note!) there is a strong heterosexual reason why I enjoy this comic -- plus I for one like Frank's rendition of Red, so knickers to you, Emlock ((Nige is no respecter of persons.. -ML)) ((Now what does THAT mean? -the real ML))!

I must admit this isn't one of Roy's better stories, and I'd like to see Bruce Jones return, maybe even drawing just for an issue or two. For this saga, as the title would suggest, Red becomes involved in a perverted version of the Olympics, finishing off with a spot of wrestling with the Spider-Queen. Yes, it's all good clean fun, folks -- well, almost... -NPE

SUPER-VILLAIN TEAM-UP #11 (April)
"My Ally, My Enemy" by Bill Mantlo,
Bob Hall & Don Perlin

Since Englehart left this book (sob!) it hasn't gone down the hill as I had expected--this is due to one Bill Mantlo. When he first started writing he wasn't too hot, but now he's turning out some really good stuff--for proof of this, look how much better Champions has become since his arrival on that book. Now I really love his work, and his script this issue was great, in particular the part where Doom was going to let Captain America drown shows how capable Bill would be on Cap's own book, if Kirby no longer wrote it. Another superb piece was where Cap had to clout Shroud (and Cap is Shroud's boyhood idol!) in order to allow Doom, their only hope, to fight the Red Skull!

Bob Hall's art was good, but I think Don Perlin's inks made him look like a cheap imitation of John Buscema, and that is one thing he is not. The best guy to embellish Bob's art is Bob Layton, who did so on Champions #9--Layton is an excellent inker, and although I do not intend to slight Don Perlin (whose art on Werewolf By Night was surpassed only by Gil Kane and Mike Ploog), I would rather see Bob Layton as the third part of the creative team. Some people may say that Bob Hall's work is a copy of John Buscema's, but as he was one of Big John's students, it's only logical that his art is similar to his teacher's.

All in all, a rather good issue, and I'm looking forward to the next. -K.Moore

SPIDER-MAN #168 (May)
"Murder on the Wind" by Len
Wein, Ross Andru & Mike Esposito

To my mind, Len Wein is doing a good job as writer/editor on this mag, keeping the series moving and introducing some intriguing sub-plots. But will he ever be able to coax the Lee-Ditko fans over to his side? with decreasing pages & looming deadlines, the poor lad's got his work cut out -- still, he tries his best.

The new "senses-shattering" superstar Will-O'-the-Wisp (silly bloody name, if you ask me!) is off to a bad start, as he apparently dies at the end; still, that never mattered to Marvel before, did it?

It's a comic worth following, even at import prices. -Nige Edwards

JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA #142 (May)
"Return From Forever" by Steve Englehart, Dillin & McLaughlin

Steve Englehart here shows how he is able to improve what had been a somewhat mediocre series, under Gerry Conway's handling. This 33-page extravaganza is centred on Aquaman, Elongated Man and, particularly, the Atom--as with his work at Marvel, Englehart imbues his characters with depth and believability, but to top it all off, there's a surprise guest star from one of Englehart's Avengers subplots! This One is a real surprise... -AJP

Well, I was looking for a mag with something in it I could pin down--I think this just might be it. Remember when Steve Skeates used the opportunity of scripting the last issue of Subby (#72) to add a postscript, to endow the word with a new dimension, to the last ish of his own Sea King's mag (ie Aquaman #56)? Well, Steve Englehart's up to the same sort of thing here, with a character that he calls Willow, but who will be instantly recognisable to all Avengers fans under another name (giveaway clue: she refers to herself as 'This One').

Now, ordinarily I would tend to condemn this as a 'cute touch', and my hatred for 'cute touches' is legend; but somehow I just can't get mad at Steve E--his writing manages to conquer everything, including fortunately this issue's lacklustre art. The pencils aren't too bad here, but the inking's even flatter than usual, and the colour's appalling. I think it's about time someone gave DC a good kick up the arts department -- their lackadaisical attitude to such matters really is not good enough.

Just a few minor points before I leave this issue behind. Firstly, the mechanical villain of this ish, called Construct, is destroyed at the end--but coming next ish is Construct 2, I can't help feeling that idea's a trifle familiar too. Secondly, I notice they're numbering the pages of the story again--now that they no longer need to feel embarrassed at the total... And, thirdly, the sales figures prior to the price and size switch (as published in this issue) look very encouraging, I hope the mag continues to do as well in the new format. With Steve Englehart at the helm, it deserves to... -K. Williams

THE BRAVE AND THE BOLD #134 (May)
"Demolishment" by Bob Haney & Jim Aparo

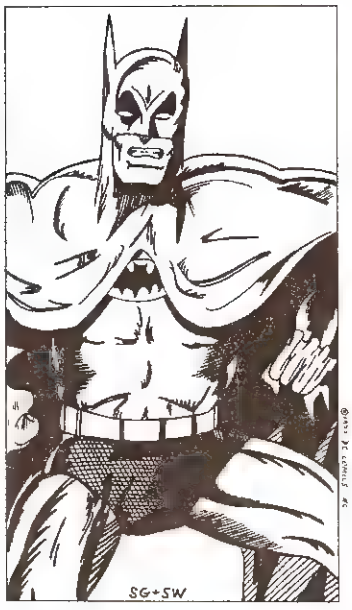
Green Lantern defects, and the Batman's 'Mission Impossible' is to enter the 'People's Republic' and retrieve him--or eliminate him. A ring-less and beaten-up GL has to watch Batman undergo 'the demolishment'--the ultimate in brainwashing --and Bats breaks under the pressure!

A nice change of pace issue, if a little lacking in super-deeds, with some admirable art by Aparo. Next issue stars the Metal Men--yes, again! -Laurence Bowkett

BLACK PANTHER #3 (Maybe)
"Race Against Time" by Jack Kirby & Mike Rotten

Ugh! Give me a stick and I'll kill it! I keep thinking that any minute I'll wake up from this nightmare, and find that Don McGregor & Billy Graham are still there, and the Panther once more stars in one of the best comics out...

As reviewer K. Swilliams wrote last time, judged objectively on its own merits it's a fair enough tale, but when the Panther with the aid of a "frog time machine" sends the menace back to its own age, I can't help wishing Kirby had gone with it. Jack is out of touch these days, and the Black Panther sums everything up when he says "Let's face it. The man belonged to another time -- another place!" Perhaps Freudian, subconscious truth from Kirby? -NPE



ADVENTURE COMICS #451 (June)
"The Secret of the Sinister Abyss" by David Michelinie & Jim Aparo; "The Suspects" by O'Neil, Nasser & Austin

This Aqua-episode must be a fill-in, as nothing really happens. Arthur Curry Jr is kidnapped, and as Aquaman races after him, he encounters that overgrown starfish, Starro (remember him from Brave & Bold #28--you do? Sure shows your age!). A fairly nondescript story, saved by Jim Aparo's industry. Next issue, Aquaman vs Aqualad--must be better.

An old JLA foe leads nicely to an old JLA member; J'onn J'onzz continues his search for the murderer of his friend, and this time picks a fight with Hawkman and Hawkgirl. Again, the story is lifted by some good artwork, though what can you do with 6 pages? Read as a complete story, though, (the final part should be in World's Finest #245) it might make more of an impression. -Laurence Bowkett

WARLORD #6 (May)
"Home is a Four-Letter Word" by Grell

Mike Grell's innovative strip goes from strength to strength, as Travis Morgan finds himself back on the surface of the Earth. But it's not long before the "Company" are hunting him, and he's soon heading back to Skartaris. You'll also find that Grell can draw women with clothes on, for a change. -A. J. Palmer

FREEDOM FIGHTERS #8 (June)
"D-Day at Niagara" by Bob Rozakis, Dick Ayers & Jack Abel

Now, as I believe I said before, my hatred for 'cute touches' is well-known, and awesome to behold; but, though 'the Crusaders' would seem to be about as cute a touch as you could get (and in retaliation to another cute touch, to boot), they're not quite what you might expect--so I'll let it pass, this time. You know, with all these 'crossovers', official and unofficial, between companies -- Supes & Spidey, Deathlok & Demon Hunter, Invaders & Freedom Fighters, etc--the prospect of one huge inter-company comics universe is becoming progressively less remote. Next question: Is that good or bad? -KW

So the characters are all rip-offs of other heroes; so what if the D.A. is like J. Jonah Jameson, if the story reads like any average issue of Spider-Man? This is pure, solid superhero entertainment that reeks of the forties and early fifties. Okay, let the intellectuals take the JLA for more scientific stories -- for me, Freedom Fighters is a steady, consistent and very interesting title. -J Garczynski

RAMPAGING HULK #2 (April)
"And Then... The X-Men" by Moench, Simonson & Alcala, plus "Scream, The Shrike" by Warner, Brown & Nebres

Great. 33 pages of the original savage Hulk, battling the X-traordinary X-Men. These are THE X-Men; not those stereotype excuses for mutants that star in the mag nowadays, but Angel, Iceman, Beast, Marvel Girl and Cyclops (not to mention Prof X) as they were meant to be portrayed. A bewildered Jade-Jaws keeps getting pummelled while being pursued by the aforementioned mutants, and a young Rick Jones. All this plus some great art by Walt Simonson (if a little dominated by Alcala) makes it a must -- maybe I should write advert pages for Marvel comics?

The Bloodstone episode is nowhere near as good as the Hulk story, but an origin, and an appearance by Iron Man next issue, should improve the strip.

Add a 5-page X-Men article, and you've got a magazine definitely worth import prices. -Laurence Bowkett

WEIRD WAR TALES #53 (May)
"Deadly Dominoes" by Harris, Ortiz & Blaisdell; "Day After Doomsday" by Kupperberg, Aclin & Wiacek; "Something to Die For" by Oleck, Chua & Howard

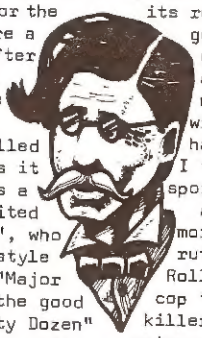
Weird War has improved since Jenette Kahn came to DC. The first story is drawn quite moderately by Juan Ortiz, but the Jack Harris script is engrossing; in war, the only winner is fate. In "Day After Doomsday", British Marvel artist Jeff Aclin pencils a well-balanced Paul Kupperberg script, although you can't get much development in 2 pages; the story moves well to its predictable, but enjoyable, ending. The final story is possibly the most boring, since Oleck wrote it, and Wayne (Midnight Tales) Howard inked it.

On balance, even the Aparo cover doesn't lift the issue much above the heights of mediocrity. -Jan Garczynski

MADE IN BRITAIN

I had intended to cover British Marvel this time, but I've decided to save them until next time (after all, you've read my article in Comics Unlimited 36, haven't you?), and look at the D.C. Thompson and IPC weekly adventure comics.

As I write, World War II is still being fought. The Axis powers are hard-pressed though, on every front -- but the war is likely to go on for many years yet. I'm talking about comics like VICTOR, WIZARD, and BATTLE PICTURE WEEKLY, of course, in which such stalwart fighters as Joe Bones, Major Eazy, Joe Two Beans, the Bootneck Boy, and the Big Palooka fight on--as do The Panzer G-Man and Hellman for the Nazis, I should add. There are a heck of a lot of footballers after a place in the England Squad, too, from schoolboys up to one who's a secret agent as well!



BATTLE is almost entirely filled with war stories, of course; as it incorporates VALIANT, there is a token present-day strip inherited from that title, "One-Eyed Jack", who is drawn by John Cooper in a style reminiscent of Frank Bellamy. "Major Eazy versus Rat Pack" tells of the good major's attempts to lead a "Dirty Dozen" type of commando group without getting a shot in the back; it's drawn by Carlos Ezquerra, who's also doing covers for the new Marvel war weekly FURY. "Johnny Red" is a pilot on the Russian front, while "Joe Two Beans" is on an island in the Pacific, and, in "Operation Black Death" secret agent Mike Nelson has penetrated Hitler's bunker. 8 stories, 32 pages, for 8p, from IPC, whose comics tend to be a little more expensive than their Dundee-based competitors, D.C. Thompson. VICTOR, for example, is the same length, for only 6p. Most of the issues I've got here are dated April 9th, and this issue is number 842, so Victor's not doing badly. The cover feature is "a true story of men at war", while the ten interior strips range from "Morgyn the Mighty" in darkest Africa to "The Tough of the Track", who must have been going for years, to war, to "Glasses of Glory", a pair of binoculars that, when looked through, show the past military exploits of an old Devon family. WIZARD has a similar format, including "The Iron Three", youngsters being trained to be the strongest in the world, "Wolf Boy", "Blakes Blenheim", a waif called "Scrappy" -- and it even has a 3-page text story. "The Clutching Hand", concerning a remote-controlled hand with lots of gadgets built in, sounds good; this issue, it's busy stealing the Crown Jewels, no less...

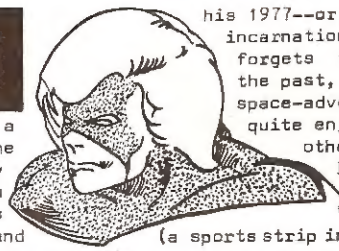
HOTSPUR, again from Thompson at 6p, has a drawback--blurbs at the top of each page I can live with, but "the last-minute men of Malaguena" or similar in the middle of the very artwork is, like, too much! I'm not sure how a strip called "The First Teacher", even if it is set in prehistory, will appeal to most readers, though. Next week brings the return of what looks like a superhero: "King Cobra"...

Moving up to 7p, here's BULLET, one of the "new breed" of more violent, realistic weeklies. Football; a version of "Ten Little Indians" set in World War II; a cave-boy reminiscent of DC's "Kong the Untamed"; the old amnesia plot ("A Boy Called Nothing"); high jinks etc at a boarding school -- er, sorry, this is 1977, it's a borstal; a giant robot; and in a massive 8-page story, the star and host of the book, "Fireball", a fellow a lot like Simon Templar, if more violent. For that extra penny, there are four more pages than most other comics.

IPC's TIGER AND SCORCHER has only 32 pages for 7p; however, you do get a full-colour centre-spread, normally used for a photo of a football team. This comic, and its recent spin-off ROY OF THE ROVERS, goes in for shorter strip episodes, usually 2 or 2½ pages, so there are a good number of features; T & S has motor-racing, football, fishing, wrestling, and autocross, while ROY has eight different football strips! I think both titles are aimed at the sports fan, somehow...

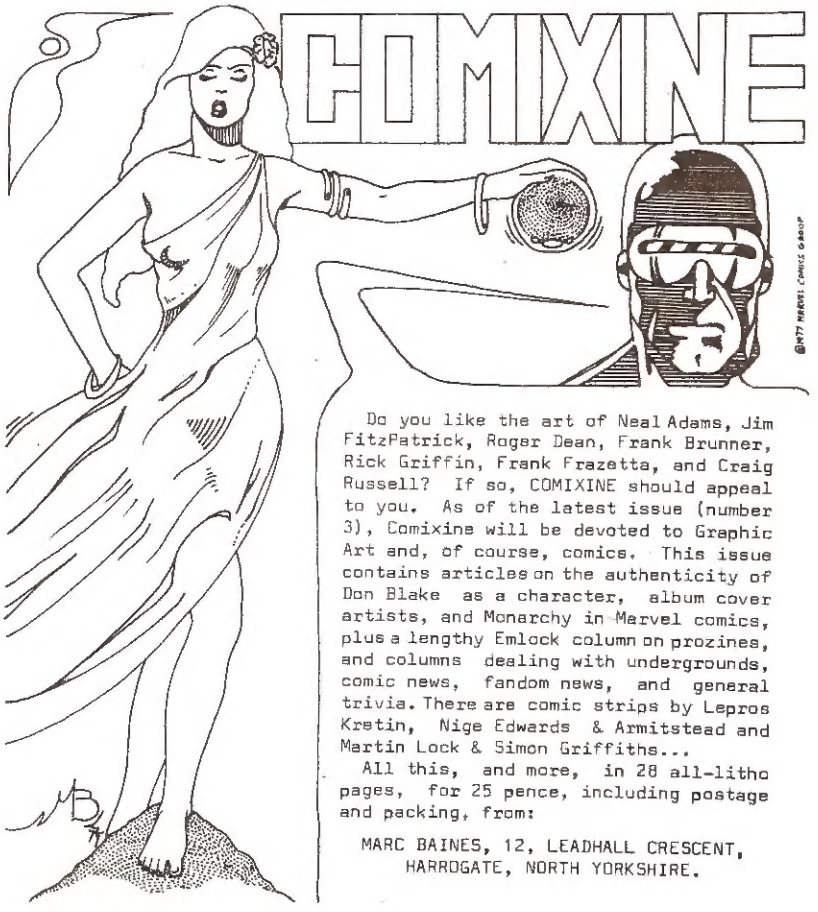
ACTION is 4 pages slimmer, and 1p more expensive, than BULLET--but with ruthless secret agent "Dredger", the Rollerball-inspired "Spinball", a new cop thriller "The Loner", that lovable killer shark "Hook Jaw", plus boxing, motor-racing, and war, it holds its own.

However, the only title I'm likely to buy next week is 2000 A.D., very much an ACTION spin-off with SF themes. Fans of the old Dan Dare may foam at the mouth at his 1977--or, rather, 2177--incarnation, but, if one forgets the glories of the past, it's a solid, space-adventure strip. I quite enjoy most of the other strips, too; Dave Gibbons is the artist on "Harlem Heroes" (a sports strip in the "Spinball" tradition--a cross between American football and basket ball, played for keeps in heavy armour and with jet-packs), and is doing a good job of injecting speed, and power, and dynamism. "Mach-1" is inspired by the Six Million Dollar Man, with just a touch of Deathlok (see the back page--plug, plug!), while "Judge Dredd", lawman on a motorbyke who gives instant justice, is pretty good...



So, with American comics the price they are, who can afford to buy them all? The home-grown variety give lots more features and substantially more pages of story for less money, so they can certainly "bridge that gap" between batches of Marvels.

And there's just space to expand our consciousness to BRAINSTORM COMIX #4; it concludes Bryan Talbot's Chester P. Hackenbush trilogy, which has to be a landmark in the history of undergrounds; if I had to compare it with any other comic, I'd choose HAROLD HEDD #2 -- Talbot is more restrained than Holmes, which is a good thing. Besides 23 pages of Chester in "A Streetcar Named Delirium", there's a 2-pager by Bonk, and good, fan-oriented features. Long may Alchemy Publications, and Polly, prosper. -RUAN LANIHORNE



Do you like the art of Neal Adams, Jim FitzPatrick, Roger Dean, Frank Brunner, Rick Griffin, Frank Frazetta, and Craig Russell? If so, COMIXINE should appeal to you. As of the latest issue (number 3), Comixine will be devoted to Graphic Art and, of course, comics. This issue contains articles on the authenticity of Don Blake as a character, album cover artists, and Monarchy in Marvel comics, plus a lengthy Emlock column on prozines, and columns dealing with undergrounds, comic news, fandom news, and general trivia. There are comic strips by Lepros Kretin, Nige Edwards & Armitstead and Martin Lock & Simon Griffiths...

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FAN-THINGS

First, an alteration to a date I gave last time--the next Birmingham Comic Mart has been delayed a week, and is now fixed for Saturday 30th April, at the Birmingham Centre Hotel in New Street--it starts at 12 noon, and all the best dealers will be there. The reason for the change of date is to avoid a direct clash with Zephyr's Liverpool Mart, which will be held on the 23rd, at the usual Bluecoat Chambers. The Birmingham Marts are now scheduled for every three or four months, as the same hotel; the next dates for your diary are August 13th and November 12th. If you're in the Midlands, come along; if London is easier to get to, try to get to Lyndhurst Hall on June 18th, October 15th, or, just in time for your Christmas shopping, the 17th of December!

Following the success of last summer's Konvention of Alternative Komix, KAK 77 is being held in July in London--for more details contact Hunt Emerson on 021-359 4192, or write to him at Arts Lab Press, Tower St, Birmingham B19 3UY. For fans of Brainstorm, undergrounds in general, and an informal approach, it will be a very enjoyable weekend, I'm sure.

Before we move on to fanzines, I'd like to answer one of the most-often asked of questions; "How can I get some good, cheap comic bags?" Ricky Appleby & Nicky Sonenfield are a couple of young fans who buy them in bulk, and sell them at what, by today's standards, are very good prices; including postage, £13.80 for 1000, £7.80 for 500, £1.80 for 100, or £1 for 50. Ring Ricky (01-794 3459) or Nicky (01-458 3988) for the full story, or seek out their Mart table--they say "satisfaction guaranteed or your money back", and they mean it.

Coming soon from John Matthews and Bem regular Phil Elliott is an all-litho, 24-page fanzine with some good strips by new fan artists. Phil showed Martin some of the pages at the last Mart, and I'm told that ELIPSE features a fine wrap-around cover by Tony "Litratrip" Schofield, and nice strips by Phil, David Jackson, Bob Watkins, and a few others. It's 20p plus postage (9p) from Phil Elliott, 37 First Ave, Chelmsford, Essex CM1 1RX, or John Matthews, 11 Kings Grove, Wardle Road, Rochdale, Lancs OL12 9HR--and that's the address for Joe Matthews, whose sword and sorcery fanzine CREATION should soon be available for 11½p by post, too.

I expect you remember Bem-11's letter from Hunter Tremayne about the fanzine he and Andy Johnson were to collaborate on; our ace reporter tracked him to his lair, the Dark They Were & Golden Eyed comics basement, to check up on progress. Well, KIDZ STUFF #1 was even then at the printer; it's A4 size, with 24 pages, and by post costs 30p. Bem contributor Kath Glancy asks "Is Marvel Real?", while HT has a story "The Man-Elf" included. Co-editor AJ writes of the "Brave New Wave" of new comix, and draws "Patty Smith Comics"; Bram Stokes is interviewed; a review section includes looks at Steranko's CHANDLER, Jeff Jones' IDYLL & SPASM, Moebius and the Rich Corben/John Jakes BLOODSTAR. Add "JLA: An Outsider's View", and art by Lepros Kretin and Guy Lawley, and all I need to add is the address: it's Hunter Tremayne, 39 Longberrys, Cricklewood Lane, London NW2 2TE. Tell him Ed sent you!

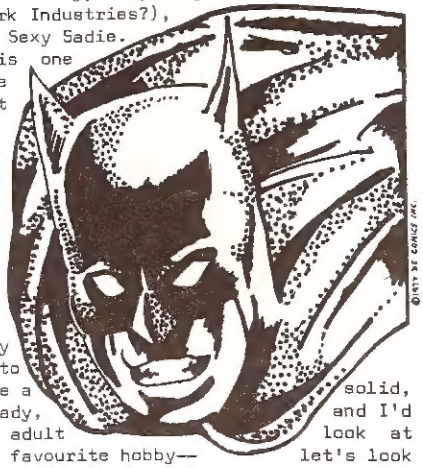
FANDOM FUNNIES is America's answer to Weird Trash; issue 3 is a spoof of "The Buyer's Guide For Comics Fandom". In 28 tabloid pages we're given such goodies as the sort of "Hostess Twinkies" ad a Warren mag might print -- by Bill DuBay and José Ortiz, no less--"The Jack Kirby School of Modern Comics Writing" ad, and merciless take-offs of every TBG column. It's a $1 zine, and Martin Lock has got copies for sale by post, at 60p from Bem's editorial address. Good value--and good fun!

Just about the only new fanzine out at the March Mart in Chelsea (the next one's on May 14th) was CROM £5, available from Mark Bilsborough, at 23 Helliwell Lane, Deepcar, Sheffield. With 24 litho pages, including an extra-slick cover, for 25p, Crom's maturing well; featured inside the Superswipe cover of Conan (of course) and Red Sonja, we find artwork by other Bem regulars Harry McAvinchey, Phil Elliott, Nick Neocleous, and Greg Chown, plus Gary Selemba and others, while the text is by Mike Grace (on Conan), Emlock (mainly on Savage Sword), Rob Young (a short story), and Kevin Eddy (part 4 of "Savage Time"), plus fanzine and book reviews and a letter column. It's a zine well worth getting.

EVOCATION is a nice name for a fanzine --it is, however, a small press art and poetry zine Don MacLeod is hoping to put out soon; since most of the contributors of art, fiction and articles are comics fans, or at least TBS contributors, it should be interesting! It'll cost 25p by post, and Don's address is 35 Old Evanton Rd, Dingwall, Ross-shire IV15 9RB.

Too late for "Reaction", but in time for this column, comes a reply to the George Barnett letter. "Okay, we forgive you, Jaws, after all you meant well but we'd rather you had printed it as a spoof of CFB instead of passing it off as a Panny spoof, and also informed us of your intentions. Still, it's all in the past now so we'll kiss and make up" --it's signed by Nige, Jack, and Pete, and all I've got to add is that I surely do hope that the reconciliation's not in public...

Since, Printer Willing, this Bem is a mere two months after Bem-12, there are not a lot of new fanzines to talk about; however, FANTASY TRADER £24 came out just too late for me to comment on then, so--here goes. This issue (16½p from Mike D. Cruden, 24 George St, Denton, Manchester M34 3DJ), in bright blue instead of black ink for a change, FT's piercing analytical gaze falls on Tarzan, especially the Burne Hogarth "Tarzan of the Apes" book--though Mike himself comments more on what Joe Kubert did, and for Marvel Roy Thomas and John Buscema will do. Some good reviews, of "Fosdyke Saga" and "Trigan Empire", too, plus news, art by Alan Hunter, Phil Rushton, "Phillipp Elliottt" and more, and a meaty 6-page lettercol written by such notables (?) as Nifty Nige, Manifold Martin (hey, Em, is your address really Stark Industries?), and Sexy Sadie.

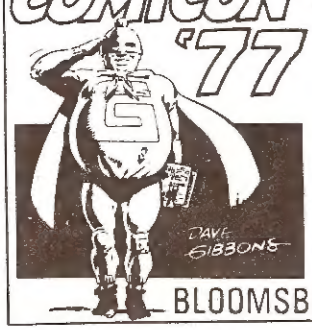


FT is one zine that we can rely on to give a steady, solid, and I'd say adult look at our favourite hobby-- let's look forward to the next issue, due soon.

But you'll have noticed the ad for the main 2-day convention that decorates my page (space donated by ML)--what else do I have to say? Following a bit of market research at the March Mart, films you can expect include the ever-popular "Enter the Dragon", "Magnum Force", "Doc Savage" and probably a Superman movie, while the talks, displays, quizzes, and of course dealers tables promise to be better than ever! If you want to book a room (£10.75 plus VAT per night for a single room, I gather), you'd better hurry, or you'll be too late!

With that wondrous warning, it's time for me to meander off for a couple more months. So, send all zines and news to the Bem editorial address--and support a few extra fanzines, would you? They're all produced with tender loving care and enthusiasm, and they all deserve a lot of extra readers. -ED SALLIS

COMICON '77



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TALE-ENDERS

Where better to start than with the new JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA, #143? On the splash page it's conveniently designated as "JLA #5 in the Steve Englehart series", which certainly reflects the new direction the world's greatest super-heroes have taken off on. It's crisis-time for the League, this issue; and, despite the whole Injustice Gang and Construct-II, a mass walk-out, and Superman battling Wonder Woman--the League stands! If there's one comic worth the new higher price of 60c, this, my friends, is it!

One of the first of the small-size DCs to come out at 35c is the first revived issue of SECRETS OF HAUNTED HOUSE, which by suspending publication for 18 months

managed to avoid the 30c price altogether. #6 has a nicely-gimmicked vampire story drawn by Gerry Talaoc, a devilish crime tale by Albano & Rubeny, and the story of a rather greedy viking band by Oleck and Jodloman. All this, and a 2-page lead-in starring Destiny, Cain and Abel, in only 17 pages? It looks as if Orlando & Levitz are coming to terms with low page-counts.

Since ISIS is one of the new-look breed of "DCTV Comics", it hasn't been dropped yet -- rather, issue five brings a "new look", with the end of the simple-minded plots and background taken from the TV show, and a shift of emphasis to Isis as goddess. The (full-length) story is by Jack C. Harris, while the art team from previous issues, Mike Vosburg and Vince Colletta, is as before--though their work here isn't as satisfying as on Starfire. A relatively intelligent comic, based on a Saturday morning kiddie TV show? It's an experiment worth trying.

KAMANDI #51 is drawn by Dick Ayers and Alfredo Alcala, joined for this one issue only by Steve Englehart, which certainly makes a change from some previous writers. But can this Englehart fill-in, concerning a rival "Last Boy on Earth", do anything lasting for Kamandi? Probably not...

"One Freeze-Dried Flash -- Coming Right Up" is the title for the latest Cary Bates Flash script, in FLASH #250. Irv Novick & Vince Colletta drew it, and nobody even thought that reaching 250 issues was worth celebrating! Unless you count the debut of a new "Rogues Gallery" member, Captain Cold's sister The Golden Glider, that is -- they certainly took their time about giving the scarlet speedster a female foe! Any similarity in names between a "Golden Glider" and a "Silver Surfer" lurks only in Cary's subconscious, I hope...

Let's hope Marvel don't copy DC and go up to 35 cents, at least for a while; they managed to hold on for five months last time, and, when that means a difference of 5 pence to import prices, the longer the better. But, as a first June Marvel, here's IRON FIST #13 -- as usual, it's by Claremont, Byrne, & Adkins, and, just as predictably, it's good. Danny Rand's ex-IRA gunman/bomber friend Alan Cavenaugh is in trouble with his one-time masters, and Boomerang, much improved since, way back in Tales To Astonish 81-88, he came up against the Hulk, is an excellent foe for Iron Fist. In SUPER-VILLAIN TEAM-UP #12, the Red Skull confrontation reaches its climax, behind a striking Cockrum & Milgrom cover, with a Bill Mantlo script and art by Bob Hall & Don Perlin. Add to the cast Doc Doom, the Shroud, Captain America, and Sub-Mariner, and you've got a book very much in its stride. The only catch, of course, is that, like Iron Fist, it's recently been cancelled...

A warning; MASTER OF KUNG FU #53 is a reprint, of Paul Gulacy's third art job for the book (#20). It's one page shorter now, by the simple method of changing the non-reduced double-spread into a single page--if you haven't got the original, it will do. It's nice that Marvel's latest Deadline Doom victims have actually been able to admit on the cover that they're reprints.

INVADERS #17 continues the story of the nazi super-soldier serum, involving Biljo White (based on a fan of that name, Rich Morrissey's predecessor as editor of Batmania), Master Man, and "The Making of Warrior Woman, 1942", which looks like the destruction of our heroes--but, next issue promises to bring us the return of Spitfire, and -- The Mighty Destroyer!

ETERNALS keeps rolling along, giving the impression that something's about to happen--it's been doing that for a year, now. All the Eternals except Ajak, called "Ajax" on the cover, who's sealed in that dome in the Andes, have united to form "Uni-Mind", which has floated off into space to think deep thoughts. Sense of Wonder this issue (#12) has got--but how about a little sense of pacing, Mr Kirby?

"Has the female fury finally met her match?" asks the cover of MS MARVEL #6--well, it certainly looks like it, as her foe this issue is Grotesk, who is out to destroy the world, starting with the Ms of Might. Only 3 pages of Jonah Jameson? Don't Claremont, Mooney & Sinnott know who really sells this book?

DAREDEVIL #146 has, as did #145, the old too-corner illo used on issues 7-26; since I didn't review the May issue, I'd better say "welcome back" now. It's also Jim "Web" Shooter's third issue as DD's scripter, and the start of a pencilling stint by Gil Kane, so all's well here.

But, since we're back at the top of the page, let's look at the book that's top of the circulation charts ("single issue nearest to filing date" managed 326,942, with a sales ratio of 50.81%) -- AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #169. If I say that it involves a Mr Jameson confronting a Mr Parker with photographs which, he implies, prove that the second-mentioned fellow is in reality a habitual web-slinger, wall-crawler, and fall-guy, and the title's "Confrontation", have I said enough? If not, may I call in page 16, panel 4, where a smilin' chap, commenting on Spider-Man's overhead antics remarks "Well, he's not exactly Vera Valiant, son--but I guess he'll do!" With that sort of dialogue, no wonder he got turned away from Reed & Sue's wedding!

GHOST RIDER #24 has arrived, to prove the mag's still being published--but with Don Heck on pencils, maybe not for much longer! Jim "Trouble" Shooter scripted, Dan Green inked, and Kane & Cockrum did the cover. CAPTAIN AMERICA #210 has the return of the Red Skull; since the pair of them have also crossed swords in two

other magazines in the last fortnight -- SUPER-VILLAIN TEAM-UP and CAPTAIN BRITAIN -- it just shows the lack of any overall co-operation between titles. The Red Skull in three places at once would be bad enough--but the Red Skull versus Captain America in Latveria, England and America all at the same time is stretching things.

THOR #260 is the start of a pencilling stint for Walt Simonson, who joins Tony DeZuniga and Len Wein on the continuing quest for Thor's dear old dad. And it's looking pretty good to me! The Enchantress and the Executioner are up to their usual tricks -- but how come there are two Gods of Thunder around, one of them out for Balder's blood? Stay tuned and find out.

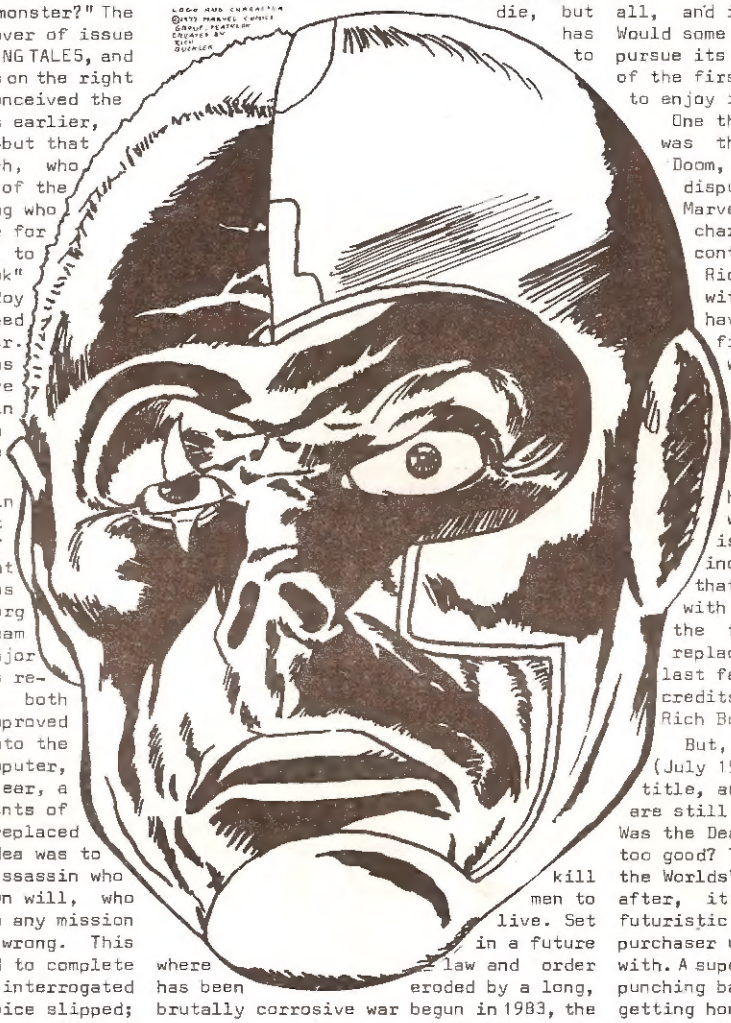
And, finally, here's KULL #21, edited by Roy Thomas, written by Don Glut, and drawn by Ernie Chan and Rick Holburg, a newcomer to comics--a whole new team, in fact, except for the editor, though it's likely that Alfredo Alcala may return to the inking soon. And there's another departure this issue, too--more I'd better not say...

Which seems a suitable point to end on; perhaps next time I'll have some Warren and Gold Key titles to include. Anyway, I'll be here if you'll be there! -ML

DEATHLOK

--HIS ASTONISHING TALE, SURVEYED BY RUAN LANIHORNE

"Is he man--or machine--or monster?" The question was posed on the cover of issue 25 (August 1974) of ASTONISHING TALES, and for once the cover blurb was on the right track. Rich Buckler had conceived the character a couple of years earlier, for a novel he may yet write--but that was before he met Doug Moench, who co-plotted and scripted five of the first six stories. It was Doug who changed Rich's original name for the character, "Deadlock", to the more intriguing "Deathlok" -- and, along with editor Roy Thomas, the two of them turned an idea into a solid character. Doug, in fact, went so far as to "immortalise" this creative process in a 2-page strip in the back of the issue, drawn by George Perez and Mike Esposito.



Luther Manning, we learn in flash-back, had been caught in an explosion, and half of his face and all of his right arm blown away. Using what was left as a basis, the cyborg Deathlok was created by a team of surgeons controlled by Major Ryker; the missing limb was replaced by a prosthetic arm, both legs were reinforced and improved with metal "bones" -- and into the shattered skull was put a computer, along with a new eye, a new ear, a new voicebox, and some fragments of Manning's brain. Metal plate replaced pulverised bone. Ryker's idea was to have a being, a soldier, an assassin who was totally without his own will, who could be programmed to perform any mission -- however, something went wrong. This computerised killer refused to complete a mission; and, when Ryker interrogated it, the cold, emotionless voice slipped; the brain-fragments of Luther Manning had regained control!

Deathlok; a man locked in death...and a character conceived a couple of years before the rather handsomer "Six Million Dollar Man" made his TV debut. Probably the TV show's success helped Rich to sell his brainchild to Marvel, if only for the fact that Steve Austin had taught a lot of people just what "cyborgs" and "bionic limbs" were. A man -- and a computer; a killer who couldn't kill himself, and end the macabre link between flesh and metal.

Deathlok's first appearance crammed a lot into fifteen pages, and, with a very competent use of cinematic techniques of inter-cutting, match-cutting, fades, and flash-back, proved that Rich Buckler was much more than the Kirby imitation some people complained he'd become on the FF. His work was still influenced by Kirby--who at Marvel wasn't then? -- but it also showed homage to John Buscema, Neal Adams, and Jim Steranko, and blended them in a way that showed that Rich Buckler had become a man to watch.

A cyborg as a hero; scientific monster, macabre nemesis of those he's paid to kill --Deathlok, a man who is longing to die, but has to kill men to live. Set in a future where law and order has been eroded by a long, brutally corrosive war begun in 1983, the story is not simple, or straight-forward --the hero is a machine who becomes a man while the villain, Ryker, his creator, is a man who became a machine. The last page of the first story brings the last irony --ryker too is a cyborg.

I don't intend to get bogged down in a set of story synopses; after all, none of the comics involved are over three years old, and, until his return in this April's MARVEL SPOTLIGHT #33, all his appearances had been properly distributed in the UK, so you've probably got most of them.

One of the most intriguing aspects of the cyborg Deathlok was the internal dialogue between the thoughts of Manning the man and his adviser, the computer, whose analysis of a situation was printed in a computer type-face. The computer had all the answers--if Manning would listen. While this could make the stories a little difficult to follow, or over-wordy, at times (especially when a THIRD voice took up residence for a while), it certainly added to the individuality of the strip. When Deathlok was planning to get himself changed back into a normal human being by surgery, it was the computer which told him "Irrational. Human tissue incorporated in this form has been dead for five years: Decay Factor is irreversible.

"Conclusion: death is a condition unalterable by surgery."

But that was a verdict the cyborg could not accept; he thought he was alive, after all, and it was his view that counted. Would some crummy robot disobey orders, pursue its own interests, and, on page 2 of the first story, prolong a kill just to enjoy it more?

One thing the series suffered from was the far-famed Dreaded Deadline Doom, caused at least in part by a dispute between Rich Buckler and Marvel about just who owned this character. Well, Marvel have been continuing to use Deathlok, and Rich Buckler is still associated with him, so an agreement must have been reached; however, the fifth episode of Deathlok's saga was delayed by an issue (#29 of Astonishing Tales reprinted the origin of the Guardians of the Galaxy instead), and the sixth episode was only 10 pages long. Episodes five and seven had a wide assortment of artists working on them, to get the issues out on time, but always including Buckler himself; after that, Rich handled full pencils, with Klaus Janson on inks -- until the final issue, where Klaus was replaced by Keith Pollard. And the last few issues, besides the normal credits, boldly stated "Produced by Rich Buckler".

But, why was Astonishing Tales #36 (July 1976) the last issue of that title, an ending so sudden that people are still looking for the next issue? Was the Deathlok series too different, or too good? Too violent? Like the "War of the Worlds" strip which finished shortly after, it was science fiction, with a futuristic setting that your average comic purchaser would find it hard to identify with. A superhero swinging over the city, punching bad guys in the solar plexus and getting home in time for late-night TV, is what the public wants -- a mixture of five-year-dead flesh and polished metal, hunting cannibals with a laser-gun and hunted by a computerised tank, is not the same sort of crowd-puller, it seems. The quality of the Deathlok series was high, and perhaps if his current appearance in MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE generates enough new interest, he will return, and time, and extra familiarity, will have made him more acceptable to a mass readership. Moving him from 1990 to 1977 will have helped in this, I expect, and seeing him meet not only Spider-Man (on the wall-crawler's own trip through time, in MARVEL TEAM-UP #46) but now also Ben Grimm, Nick Fury, Fixer, Mentallo, and the whole FF, will make him better known.

But, will Deathlok the guest-star be the special character that Rich Buckler, along with Doug Moench, first brought to the comics page? Unless the focus is on him, and his internal dialogue, I don't see quite how he can be. -RL